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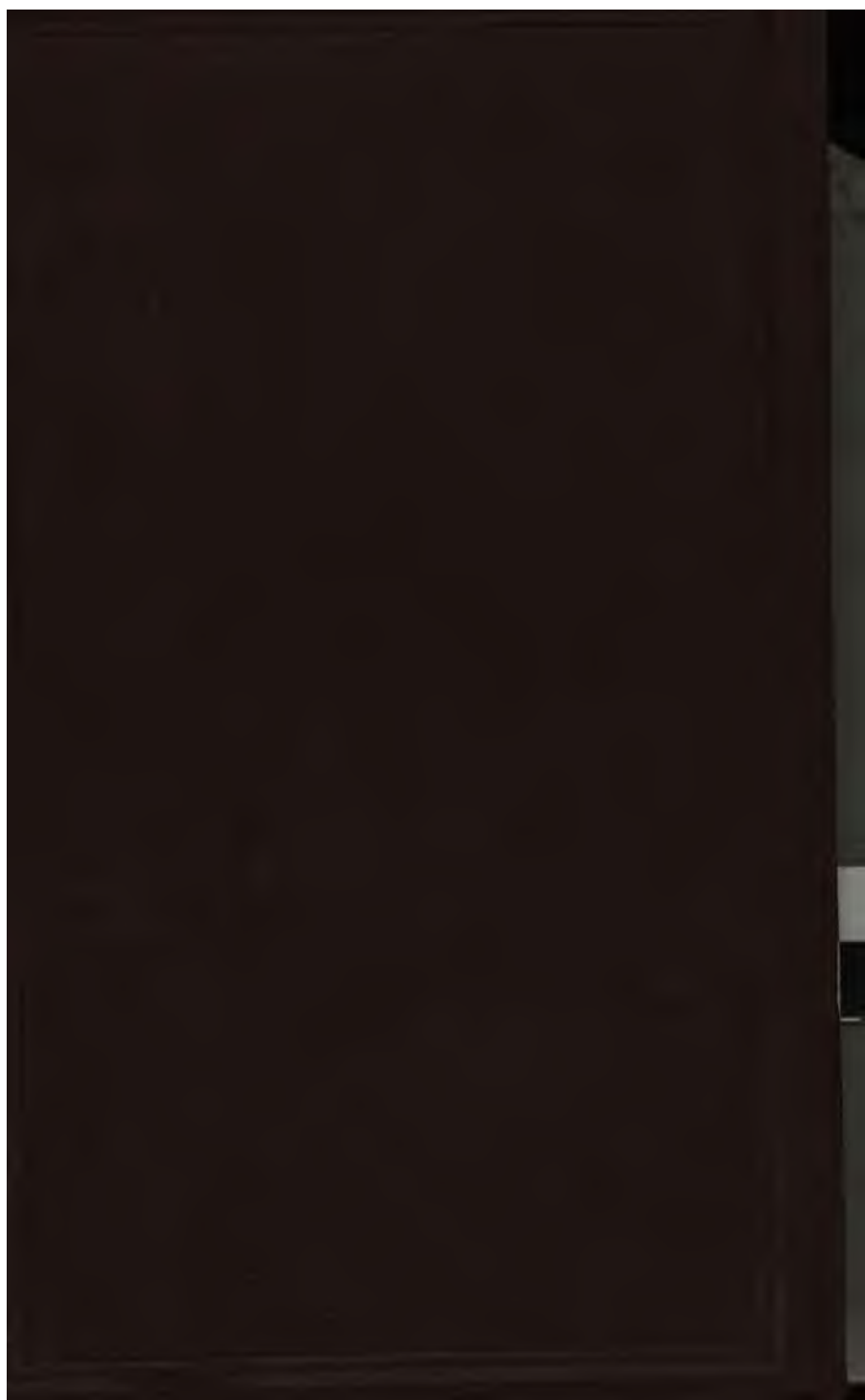
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MILDRED'S WEDDING.



VOL. III.



MILDRED'S WEDDING.

A Family History.

BY FRANCIS DERRICK,

AUTHOR OF "THE KIDDLE-A-WINK."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

"Already full of years and heaviness,
I turn to former thoughts of young desires."

MICHAEL ANGELO.

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MILDRED'S WEDDING.

CHAPTER I.

"DEAR ESTHER," wrote my mother, "I am sorry I have not had time to correspond with you since I quitted Bath, but really I have been too worried—about things and people I don't want to mention in letters—and I'm quite altered. I've grown so thin and ugly I don't know myself when I look in the glass. I write now because your father has been so ridiculous as to order me to send a man-servant to escort you down to that old dungeon at Treval, and he says you are to go post, which I shouldn't care about if he didn't tell me to send you the money, which I can't do. The truth is, he

remitted me an order on his banker for a certain sum for you, and I've spent it—you can guess how. There now, you know it, and you can do what mischief you choose—not that I'm much afraid of your telling, for you've sense enough to know that it is as much for your interest as for mine to be silent. Of course I shall not send the servant, and you can go just as safely in the stage as you can in a post-chaise. All you'll have to do is to tell your father you posted, and he'll be satisfied; or if you particularly care for posting, for the gentility of the thing, you can write to old Adder and Mildew, and get the money out of them; they'll send it fast enough. I have had money of them already under the pretence of wanting it for you, so if anything is said about this by these two old skeletons you'll please to say you had it. Don't forget this: it's important, for if they knew I had cheated them I should never get another penny,

and you don't know how urgently I may want their help.

“ You are to stop a week or two at Exeter, on your way down, with an aunt of mine—a little old frump who has taken it into her head she wants to see you; so without asking me she had the impudence to write and get those ancient mummies at Treval to consent to your visit, and *then* she writes and asks me, as if I had a voice in the matter, or cared one farthing whether you stopped with her or no! I warn you, however, that you must keep your wits about you in her presence; she's a regular pump, and she'll never stop till she gets something out of you. She believes a certain person died and was buried peaceably some hundred years ago, so if you do let out the contrary you'll please to take all the consequences on yourself, for I won't.

“ I have nothing more to say, except that you may give my dearest love to Aunt

Frump; she has saved up money, so be particular in making it dearest love, and you may invent any fibs in the civil line that you choose as coming from me to those anatomies at Treval. I wish they were dead, that's all the harm I wish them; and, little as I've been permitted to care for my own child, I really do wish you safe out of their clutches. If *I* had brought you up I expect you wouldn't be so much like Methuselah's grandmother as you are, nor yet such a dreadful witch of a child that it's enough to make one's hair stand on end only to look at you. I send you Aunt Priscilla's address. You must write and tell her what day she is to meet you at the arrival of the coach.

“Your affectionate mother,

“LUCY TREGANOWEN.

“P.S.—Be particular when you write your father, in saying you have had the

money he sent for your journey. I've told him so already, but it is safer for you to say it too. The stage-coach fare you must ask Mrs. Spencer for. She can put it down in the bill to the drawing-master, or somebody: it's easily arranged in that way."

I shed no tears over this letter—I was past that. I don't even know that I was shocked. I had fathomed my mother's mind long ago, only I remarked with bitter pain that its tone was lower than of old; a long course of deception and fear had so blinded her, that for her, truth now existed in no one's soul, and she thought it as easy a matter for Mrs. Spencer and myself to deceive as it was for her. She had not even the air of asking a favour, it was such an every-day commonplace thing to her what she desired us to do.

I resolved not to increase my father's humiliation in his wife by divulging any of this to him, and mentioning it to Mrs.

Spencer was out of the question. I wrote to Miss Mildred, candidly telling her the truth, but sparing my mother as much as possible, and I assured her I only feared to travel by the stage lest I should vex my father. In a week came, not an answer, but her man, Pryor, with a handsome new chariot—very different from the old landau—and a hundred guineas in a little packet. A month before she had sent a liberal sum to Mrs. Spencer, requesting it might be expended in a becoming and fashionable outfit for me, so this further generosity both touched and irritated me. I wanted nothing, so I spent only a few guineas in presents to the servants and the doctor's poor pensioners, whom he had bequeathed to me, and I put the rest away in my well-packed trunk.

Mrs. Spencer charged me with letters and numberless messages for her brother, which I was to deliver as soon as I reached Treval.

"If any news arrives of Hubert I'll let you know," she said carelessly.

Then we parted, not without tears, for I certainly owed her much, and I was leaving her house with many acquirements which her steady, methodical, motherly ways had materially helped me to gain. In one word I had found a *home* beneath her roof, and if I was now an accomplished woman I owed it to her and hers.

We performed our journey to Exeter without incident, and drove directly to my great-aunt's, Pryor evidently knowing the house.

It was a ladies' school of the very genteel-est order, the mansion standing in a highly respectable manner in its own grounds, carefully walled in from all beholders.

Two housemaids, washed and polished to a shining red, like streaked apples, met us at the door and ushered me into a parlour, where a little old lady jerked herself up

from an arm-chair like a Jack-in-the-box, and in the same bobbing manner as if she were pulled up and down by a string, came forward to meet me.

"So this is my sister Barbara's grand-child," said the old lady in a little squeaky, thin, metallic voice, exactly as a Jack-in-the-box might be supposed to speak if it could.

As I had never heard of my grandmother Barbara, I could only presume she was correct, and better informed as to my ancestry than myself.

"I am General Treganowen's daughter Esther," I answered, receiving the old lady's kiss.

"You are welcome, my dear. And who is this?"

"I'm Jenifer Penaluna, and I've took care of Miss Esther nearly five years, ever since she was thirteen, and master always likes me to sleep en tha next room to hers.

.

And Dr. Spencer said I was never to leave her out of my sight waun minute, so please show us our room, and let there be a door between," said Jenifer, all in one breath.

Miss Priscilla Polwhele bobbed up and down with three quick little jerks while Jenifer was speaking, and then, as if perfectly satisfied, she got into her box—the arm-chair—and shut herself in with a little mahogany bar which ran across from elbow to elbow, and seemed indispensable to her Jack-in-the-boxish comfort.

"Show Miss Treganowen her room," she said to the shining servants, "and let a bed be put up in the closet next it for this young woman. My dear, I suppose Miss Tremaine's carriage and servant will return to Treval?"

"I think Miss Mildred wishes Pryor to remain here with the carriage till I go, aunt."

Never having known what it was to

have relations, the unwonted word dropped timidly from my lips. Miss Priscilla noticed it, and gave such a high jerk in her box that but for the bar I verily believe she must have popped out of it altogether.

“Let me see Miss Tremaine’s servant.”

In a moment Pryor stood at the door.

“What are your orders, please, from your mistresses?” asked Miss Priscilla.

“I am to stay at the London inn with the carriage till Miss Esther leaves, ma’am, and I am to hire horses and drive round every day to take her out wherever she pleases to go.”


“Very proper—very proper indeed,” responded Miss Priscilla, with two tremendous jerks of satisfaction. Her thin face, her hooked nose, her little frizzed yellow wig, and her long waist—for she was dressed in the style of my grandmother—made such a queer figure that I could scarcely refrain from laughing.

She was evidently highly delighted at having so important a person as myself to show to her young lady boarders as her grand-niece, for she paraded me in triumph over the house, presenting me to more girls and women than I had ever seen before in my life.

As I gazed at the loud, fagged, lean teachers, and glanced at the long line of girl faces, all looking more or less uncomfortable and hungry, and then turned my eyes on a formidable array of back-boards, dumb-bells, and stocks, I shuddered, and remembered thankfully that if none of my young life had been crushed out of me in this heavy atmosphere, I certainly owed it to Dr. Spencer. If I had been lonely I had been free, and my frame had never been tortured or distorted by any diabolical contrivances such as I saw here. Young ladies of the present day little think what miseries were inflicted on their

grandmothers under the name of education.

My aunt and I dined in state alone, but after the first day or two I ventured to request the company of two of the girls, and in this way I ran Miss Priscilla's good dinners through the whole of the hungry school. It surprised me to see with what perfect conscientiousness and placid piety she considered stale bread, milk-and-water, and tough meat—and very little of it—proper and sufficient food for her pupils and teachers, while, *vice versa*, nothing was too good for herself. Nevertheless, Miss Priscilla and I got on very well together, she measuring me by the boarding-school measure that fitted all her young ladies, while I should as soon have thought of anatomising my living body for her satisfaction, as of letting her see anything that was in my mind. Still she complacently considered she was learning to know me,



though, with sundry little jerks, she would sometimes stop uneasily in her supposition as to my character, and begin a series of questions in as circumspect a manner as her awe of Treganowen Towers, her respect for the Misses Tremaine of Treval, and her reverence for Pryor and the carriage would permit her to do.

“So you positively knew nothing of your mother’s family, my dear, till you knew me?”

“No, aunt.”

“And you never heard any one mention your grandmother Barbara?”

“Never.”

“Very odd, isn’t it? Here’s her picture, my dear”—taking an old-fashioned miniature from her neck, which opened with a snap like the bark of a cur. “You see she was very handsome.”

Grandmother Barbara certainly was very handsome, and I did full justice

to her beauty as I handed back the picture.

The little Jack-in-the-box sighed deeply, and jerked herself up twice very high, as if anxious to be questioned.

"And what relation was my grandmother to you, aunt?"

"Bless the child! Why, my sister, to be sure."

"I thought mamma was your brother's daughter, else how was her name Polwhele?"

Miss Priscilla nearly jerked herself out of her chair at this remark; then subsiding into it, and collapsing into the smallest possible space, she laid her skinny forefinger on my arm.

"Esther, my dear, it is a sad story, and there's a mystery in it never cleared up, but I'll tell you Barbara's history as far as I know it. In fact, Miss Mildred wishes me to tell you. She is too proud to speak of such things herself. She is a noble lady;

she bought the goodwill of this house for me, and furnished it. Let me see, there are six four-post——”

“But about Grandmother Barbara, aunt?”

“My dear, did you ever hear of my brother, Dr. Polwhele?”


“The uncle with whom my mother lived before her marriage? Yes, I have heard of him, but Prudence White said he was not a doctor, but a chemist and druggist, and he kept a little shop at Penrhyn.”

“Hush, my dear! please don't repeat any insolence of Prudence White's here among the young ladies. I always physic them from my brother's old prescriptions, and they would lose all respect for him if they heard such a tale; perhaps they'd even refuse to take his draughts, and that would be a great loss to me, for I still have a lot of drugs from the dispensary.”

My aunt made a very high jerk at the word, which caused me a smile, as a few

days' acquaintance with her had shown me that every genteel falsehood was accompanied by a jerk more or less high according to the magnitude of the fib.

"Dr. Polwhele, my dear Esther, was a highly-respectable man. He drove a yellow gig when he retired from"—jerk—"his profession, and always wore buckles in his shoes. He was a great deal older than Barbara and I, and when we were left orphans, he brought us up, and kindly too. He was very fond of Barbara, she was so pretty, and fancying he could do better for us in London, we left Cornwall, and went up by the van—it was very genteel to travel by van then, so you needn't feel hurt about it, Esther. But we had hard times in London, and were right glad when a friend came to our aid. He was Cornish, he said, and with a pleasant smile, and the old motto 'One and All,' he overruled every hesitation on my brother's part in



accepting his benefits. But, my dear, it was false help, false kindness; my sister Barbara ran away with him, and we never saw her pretty face again. All inquiries failed to elicit anything, save that he had given us a false name; and so well had he taken his wicked measures that we never discovered his real one. My brother was a proud man; he quitted his"—jerk—"practice in London, and returned with me to Cornwall, and set up at Penrhyn"—jerk—"as a surgeon. Our life was such a hard struggle at first that I deemed it my duty not to be a burden to him, the more especially as we quarrelled rather about Barbara. I wasn't pretty at all, my dear, and I was horribly disgusted with Barbara, and he was always wasting money in inquiries and endeavours to get her back—a proceeding I didn't approve of. So we parted, and I went out as"—jerk—"a finishing governess."

Poor Miss Priscilla! I learned afterwards that she honestly and honourably earned her living as a lady's-maid, an occupation which made her inexpressibly genteel, and fitted her for success in her future profession, nothing beguiling the parental heart like her high testimonials for ultragentility and acquaintance with the aristocracy.

"Well, my dear, years passed on, and meanwhile a lady"—jerk—"whose daughter I had educated—the Countess of Phlunkeyville—died, and left me a little money, and I was living at Penrhyn keeping house for my brother, when who should call one day to see us but Miss Mildred Tremaine, with four horses, and her coachman in a wig."

I sighed so deeply at this point that Miss Priscilla, in a fright, jerked herself up violently, and but for the bar that held her in, she would certainly have fallen out of her

chair in a stiff Jack-in-the-box attitude on the hearthrug.

“Sighing is very bad for young ladies. I’ll give you something to-night, my dear, which my brother highly recommended in such cases. Well, Miss Mildred asked to see my brother, and of course he was highly flattered, and tearing off his apr”—jerk—“Turkish dressing-gown, he put on a coat, and retired into our back drawing-room with her. And what do you think she had come about? She had found Barbara! she had! —Miss Mildred! who we thought had never heard of Barbara in her life! She had found her out, or rather she had found her grave and her children. She had two, a boy and a girl, but the boy was dead, and the girl, who was years and years younger than her brother, was living very wretchedly in a garret in Plymouth. You needn’t be at all hurt, Esther. I’ve heard it is quite a genteel thing lately to live in a


garret ; so many of the German princes and emigrants over here have preferred garrets to first-floors that attics are quite fashionable. Not that you need mention this fact about your mother at a dinner-party or in general society, and I would rather you did not name it to the young ladies ; I already have some difficulty in making them take my brother's draughts. I had a good many drugs on my hands twenty years ago, but I've gradually disposed of them to parents in this manner, and I must confess, Esther, I don't want to lose the rest of the stock through a want of respect on the part of pupils for my family. Well, to go on with my story. Poor Barbara had died miserably in abject poverty, and my brother cried—positively cried—Esther, when he heard it. So Miss Mildred found it an easy task, working on his weakness, to persuade him to take Barbara's girl, and give her a name and a home. I very properly objected to

this course, but Miss Mildred has a winning way with her, and she induced me to consent to it. I came up here to live, and your mother took my place at Penrhyn. Lucy was a very pretty girl of about twenty, but she had been terribly neglected, and her education was sadly deficient in gentility. Nevertheless, she was very sharp, and so close, that her uncle, with all his kindness, never won from her any details of her childish days. I dare say, Esther, you find her much the same now?"

"I have talked so little with her," said I, sadly. "But surely she could not have been so old as you say, she looks so young still."

"Lucy is a good deal older than she looks," said the old lady, complacently. "But knowing nothing of her childhood, it was hard for us to tell her age. She puts herself back full five years, I believe. My brother found out that Barbara's son had

been a sad scamp, even a thief, I fear—you need not feel hurt, Esther, I've heard of very genteel people taking to the road, and Mr. Turpin, I believe, was quite a gentleman—so he made it a shiny-queer-noun—I learnt a little Latin in the sho——”—a high jerk—“in the dispensary—that unless this rascal was really dead he wouldn't take Lucy. Well, Lucy assured him he was dead, and Miss Mildred said that unless she had felt certain of his death she would not have interested herself in Lucy; so it was all settled as I have said, and she took up her abode at Penrhyn. Then the Miss Tremaines visited her, which caused her to be well received by the people of the town, and as she was very sharp and quick to learn, she soon got on. And she drove about in the Treval carriage with Miss Admonitia, and often went with Miss Mildred to Treganowen Towers—which is the grandest place for miles and miles



round—and there she showed her all the beautiful furniture, and pictures, and family plate, and jewels. And at last she asked her one day what she'd give to be mistress of it. And Lucy, naturally enough, said she'd give a good deal, and then and there Miss Mildred drove a bargain with her. If she married Colonel Treganowen and had children she was to give her eldest girl to Miss Mildred, to be hers absolutely, without interference or remonstrance. You are that child, Esther, and it is well for you that such a bargain was made, for you'll have an immense fortune, Treganowen will be yours; and if you marry as Miss Mildred wishes, I've no doubt you'll have Treval too."

"And if I don't marry as she chooses?" said I.

"Then you'll certainly lose Treval, and perhaps Treganowen as well, for your mother says Miss Mildred assuredly holds some power by which she can dispose

of it in spite of your father's apparent rights."

An instinctive feeling told me this assertion must be true, but a natural repugnance to converse on a subject so irritating and painful to my father kept me silent.

"It was an unnatural and wicked thing," said I abruptly, "to part with a child for the sake of making a rich marriage."

"Well, so it was, but Lucy, was very sadly situated. My brother was just dead, and his little annuity died with him; she had no home. My strict principles would not permit me to offer her one here; not knowing how she had been brought up, I couldn't answer for her gentility to parents, and I had positively two baronets' daughters in the house then, so the idea of her coming here was out of the question. I suspect, too—close as Lucy is—that at that time she had some other trouble—some low friend

connected with her childhood was threatening or frightening her, and going to India seemed to her like escaping to paradise. So she was glad enough to agree to Miss Mildred's terms. It is my belief, even if she ever hesitated at all, every scruple vanished directly she set her eyes on the lovely silks, and satins, and heaps of fine things that Miss Mildred had down from London for her outfit. She went out to Calcutta with a lady and gentleman whom the colonel knew well, and it was at their house he met her and fell in love with her, at least, I suppose he did, for at all events he married her, and very soon, too, after she landed."

What a strange influence Miss Mildred must have possessed over my father to bring about such a marriage! A poor girl, worse than fatherless, the daughter of an outcast mother, the sister of a robber, her mind debased, her heart hardened, the wretched

experiences of misery her only education—and this was my mother! I closed my eyes in sick pain and fear. Such a tangled web lay coiled about me that I felt powerless. I cannot move, I thought, without striking, perchance, my father or my mother; bound hand and foot, we lie at Miss Mildred's mercy. But my spirit revolted at this idea, and the resolve that had burned in my heart so long blazed up furiously, through the momentary quailing of my courage.

“Wait,” I said to myself. “Let me get to Treval, and it shall not be long before I have Miss Mildred at my mercy, and when my day comes——”

My face flushed, my hands trembled, and even my imagination, wild as it was, refused to paint what the result might be.

“At all events,” I said, shrinking from my other thoughts, “she shall not dispose of me as she pleases. I will not marry Sir Stephen Tremaine.”

Then I reflected that it was highly probable he might give himself the pleasure of rejecting me first, and this idea galled me as it did when I wept beneath the old ash-root. I looked up, and caught Miss Priscilla's pale green eyes fixed on me with intense curiosity.

"Do you think, my dear," she said, smiling at me like an amiable Jack-in-the-box, as she was, "that Miss Mildred may not possibly have already fixed upon some one for you?"

"Miss Mildred has never taken me into her confidence, aunt," I responded.

"Ah, well," and Miss Priscilla shrank down very visibly in her box, "because I was thinking, if you were not pre-engaged, I would"—a courageous little jerk—"give a ball while you were here."

"How can I be engaged anywhere, aunt, when I have not a single acquaintance in Exeter?"

•

"I don't mean that kind of engagement, my dear. The fact is, a young friend of mine—young Mr. Buttercombe—perhaps you have remarked him at church, Esther; he wears glasses, has rather a fresh colour, and sand—I mean light hair. A well-made young man, except, perhaps, his limbs, which are a trifle long and shaky, but they don't show in his pew; you must have noticed him, my dear."

I assured my aunt that her friend had completely escaped all remark from me.

"Well, my love, he has noticed you," said my aunt, letting the lid off herself, as it were, entirely, and jerking her little frame bolt upright. "And he is the very greatest match in all Devonshire; he is the only son of Sir Mannamead Buttercombe, of Mannamead Hall!"

And having imparted this astounding intelligence in the stiffest of all Jack-in-the-box attitudes, with her arms stuck out, and

every finger on end like little pistols, my aunt put the lid on herself slowly, and subsided gradually downwards.

"Is he?" said I, yawning drearily. "Well, I'll look at the greatest match in Devonshire the next chance I have."

"And shall I give the ball?"

"If you like, aunt."

"Perhaps," said Miss Priscilla, reflectively, "you prefer a quiet party — just eight or ten nice people."


"As you please, aunt."

"Well, what do you say to my just asking him simply to tea?"

I laughed a little at the dimensions my aunt's ball had taken, but I acquiesced in her proposition very willingly, seeing which she was led into a further communication.

"The fact is, my dear, Mr. Buttercombe spoke to me in the cathedral-yard on Sunday, and begged for an introduction to you. 'Your niece is a most lovely lady, Miss

Polwhele,' he said. And the poor young man was trembling so that I really thought his legs would have broken down under him. Then the baronet came up and shook hands with me most cordially; and in the course of a very pleasant chat, he asked incidentally if you were not the Miss Treganowen who was the heiress of Treganowen Towers. Then, on my saying yes, he beckoned to Lady Buttercombe—who really, Esther, hasn't done more than bow to me for the last three years, owing to a difference we had"—jerk—"about a pig. You see, I had Miss Buttercombe at that time, and I took out her education in pork and poultry, and so forth, and Lady B—— was too sharp for me; her bills doubled mine; I was obliged to give Miss B—— the measles and send her home. I wouldn't have done it but for short weight; but when butter was two ounces short, and pigs were ten or twelve pounds less than bills said



they were, I was obliged to have recourse to harsh measures. Lady B—— is a great farmer, and makes a deal of money by it. She sells her butter and milk, pork, mutton, wheat, hay, in fact everything to the hall, and the unfortunate Sir Mannamead pays for it, so all the housekeeping money goes into her ladyship's pocket. If I had *her* in the school, I'd have given her the small-pox, but as it was only Miss Melissa, measles squared our accounts mildly, and we bowed very politely to each other after I had sent in the doctor's bill. Well, I was going to tell you, she came up mighty graciously to me, saying what an age it was since we had met, and the next time she drove into Exeter she would certainly give me a call.

“‘My dear, we have been talking about Miss Polwhele's lovely niece, the heiress of I don't know how many Cornish mines and manors, my love,’ said Sir Mannamead— ‘the young lady that this boy here’—and

he gave his son such a poke with his umbrella, that, considering how shaky the young man is on his—a—a—supports, it's a mercy he didn't fall down—'has been staring at every Sunday, and every week-day, too, since he found out how often she goes to the daily service.'

"Young Mr. Buttercombe blushed up scarlet, Esther, and I believe if he could have crept into a tomb he would have been thankful; then my lady, who seemed quite to forget the pig and the measles, said, smilingly—

"'If we all come up in the afternoon, won't you give us a cup of tea, Miss Polwhele?'

"There, my dear, that's the upshot of the matter, and—well, I rather think they'll be here to-morrow."

"And you told me this family history about my grandmother Barbara and my uncle the highwayman in order that I

might not behave too proudly to Mr. Buttercombe, eh, aunt?"

My aunt collapsed into her box at this question, and shut the lid on herself so tightly that it seemed scarcely possible she could jerk upwards again under half-an-hour; however, in less than that time she slowly opened one of her eyes, and looked at me sharply.

"You are a clever girl, Esther, and you are both right and wrong there. Miss Mildred gave me a hint to tell you all this. She hates your mother; if she could have had you grow up like a mushroom, without a mother, she would. It's my belief it would give her a fit to be obliged to conquer her pride, and name the Polwheles to you. Still, now you are old enough, you must be told these things, and she is glad to make use of my tongue to do it. And, to be sure, I am always pleased to oblige Miss Mildred; she is very kind to me; she

has just got me three new boarders—sisters—the Misses Behenna of Tywardreath, those tall girls who ate so much at dinner yesterday, Esther.”

“Poor things!” said I. How they would bless me, I thought, if they knew that some of the coil that wraps me about has caught them like a lasso, and dragged them into this bondage!

“Poor things!” repeated Miss Priscilla. “My dear, they are very lucky things. It was a wonder I had a vacancy. I wouldn’t have put the Miss Bolters and the Miss Colters to sleep three in a bed to oblige any lady but Miss Mildred.”


CHAPTER II.

THE morning after this conversation, as I was putting on my hat to go to the cathedral, the recollection of the amiable Mr. Buttercombe obtruded itself on my mind, and half-changed my resolve. Oh, how I wish it had wholly done so, and that I had not bent my steps thitherward in the rosy sunshine, blindly rushing on my fate, too scornful of my poor admirer to care how he interpreted my presence! A something jarred on my nerves that morning. I had borne Miss Priscilla's story of my grandmother Barbara apparently unmoved, but it had stung me, and I dreamt that night of her son Paul. It was this dream, I thought, which made me discover a like-

ness to him in a man who stood leaning against a pillar as I entered the cathedral, and when on rising from prayer I saw he had joined the scanty congregation and taken a seat in front of me, I still thought it was my dream which made me regard him with a secret terror as I fixed my gaze on his hideous bullet head, which bent itself in mock devotion within my touch.


Thus absorbed, I rose mechanically when the beautiful chant rang out into the nave, never heeding a gentleman who stood next me, till he politely handed me a psalm-book, then, turning to thank him, I saw—Sir Stephen Tremaine!

I knew him again instantly, and a deep flush covered my brow, but he evidently took this for the natural embarrassment of a girl, for there was no recognition in the gaze of intense admiration which shot from his eyes. As I had not permitted him to catch a glimpse of my face on the night



we met on the road to Clifton, he had not really seen me since I sat under the ash-tree in the wintry avenue at Treganowen, and that was nearly five years ago, when I was a puny child of thirteen. With a throb of joy too deep to be mere vanity, I acknowledged to myself that no thought of that weird, witch-like little figure would be likely to intrude on his mind in the presence of the tall, stately girl on whom he was now gazing. No one was more conscious than myself of the great change that had taken place in my appearance. Feeling sure, then, that recognition was impossible, I took at once the tone of a perfect stranger, accepting frankly Sir Stephen's politeness with that cold ease yet reserve of manner which women so well know how to assume. Nevertheless, inwardly I was fearfully agitated. For five years this man had made a part of my existence. What did it matter that I had thought of him unkindly? that he held


possession of my thoughts was the great point gained, and this gave him his power. Dreams, hopes, plans—all the more dangerous to my peace from the fact that no one guessed them—had revolved all these years round his image. From the day, so long ago, when I read my father's letter to Miss Mildred, his shadow had haunted my imagination. Sometimes I fancied Miss Mildred had permitted me to read these fateful words, knowing well the effect they would have on my mind. The idea of a fixed fate, from which I could not flee, a destiny shadowed out from which there was no escape, would, she knew, impress my mystic-loving nature deeply. Henceforth this unknown figure, having no shape or form, would stand before me in awful distinctness as my Fate, and I should be repulsed and impelled towards it alternately, in all the trouble of that shifting sea of thought on whose waves rides Love. But



when this figure took a shape in my mind, surrounded by its halo of beauty, its laughing insolence, its contempt for my weird ugliness, and its mocking refusal to have me thrust on its destiny, the excitement of battle was added to the idea of fate, and I accepted his defiance with a glow of rage and satisfaction. He had forgotten these things; he was a man out *in* the world, living his life, every branch and leaf quivering in the full sunlight of freedom; I was a woman out *of* the world, dreaming my life, not living it; not a branch, not a stem dared put forth bud or flower; all my vitality was hidden beneath the surface, like the sap in the strong, gnarled roots of the leafless tree. All the more did this suppressed life quiver and glow within me, like the smothered fire of a volcano; and in all the ignorance of youth I longed for the throe and the tempest through which it should burst into flame.

Thus, with all the shadows of my childhood looming down upon me, with all the words of his insolence ringing in my ears, with the presence of the unknown Alice twitting me, I stood next Sir Stephen Tremaine, holding the book that he held, while I felt in my heart that strange attraction and repulsion, whose shifting changes precede passion.

Vainly I rebuked myself, and reminded my conscience in what place I stood. The sense of fate and the certainty that I had excited his admiration drew my furtive gaze again and again upon his face. I marked how five years of life—full life—had changed the handsome stripling into the man—the very man to win a woman. He had fought, he had been wounded, his name had passed from lip to lip, and something of the halo of the hero blinded my eyes as I gazed, while a thousand female demons of vanity and coquetry whispered



that, brave as he was, I might, perhaps, teach him to be timid.

The service was over, but I scarcely knew it till I found myself going out with the throng. Then I felt ashamed to think that my worship had been as unreal as that of the man with the bullet head, whom my dream had invested with a likeness to Paul.

I was conscious that Sir Stephen Tremaine was following me; I felt his presence, though I dared not turn to ascertain the fact. I hurried on through the cathedral doors into the yard, but here a weak figure, faintly smiling beneath his glasses, presented himself before me, and held out a small note.

"Permit me to introduce myself," said the figure, in a thin, conceited voice. "I am Mr. Buttercombe. I have had the pleasure of calling at Stock House this morning, and was sorry not to find you at home."

I bowed, and waited for the rest of his


speech. My aunt's description had rendered it easy to recognise this long, lathy young gentleman, who, from his general milky-yellowness of hair and complexion, was not unlike a pale canary in spectacles. His costume to his boots, coat excepted, being of sickly nankeen, greatly added to this resemblance, and I was obliged to look down in order to hide the smile in my eyes.

"Your aunt charged me to find you and give you this letter," said Mr. Buttercombe.

"Thank you," I said, taking it, and attempting to pass on; but my new acquaintance barred the way with a simper, his pale eyes looking like two curious specimens of the oyster tribe, preserved beneath glass cases.

"Had you not better read the letter?" he said.

I looked round, and saw Sir Stephen Tremaine feigning to examine the cathedral



with great interest, while in reality he was watching this singular interview with curiosity. This circumstance added to my annoyance.

"I do not suppose the letter requires immediate perusal, sir," I replied, in an icy tone.

"I beg your pardon," rejoined the gentleman, with a smile of superior intelligence, "*I* think it requires immediate attention. Miss Polwhele impressed that fact on my mind with great care."

Utterly exasperated, and seeing at the same time that Sir Stephen, although not within hearing, had drawn nearer, I tore the note open, and read an urgent request that I would call at a certain milliner's in the High-street, with directions respecting a new cap, my aunt having nothing fit to wear in the evening before such high society as Sir Mannamead and his lady.

"Well, you find I am right," simpered

Mr. Buttercombe; the note is very important, is it not? I know all about it, you see. Allow me to escort you."

He hooked out his arm, like an angular stake, expecting me to take it, but I felt the fin of a flabby fish would be less repugnant to my touch, so I feigned not to see this movement, and walked on composedly, but inwardly chafing.

What would Sir Stephen do if this buttercup were not here? Had he recognised me? Would he speak? It was impossible to tell, for the odious Buttercombe—I thought he looked like butter altogether—a long, thin pound, imprinted with a fool's head, and standing on end—continued to walk by my side, pouring his inanities into my ear. I did not know in the least what he said. My thoughts were down at Treganowen by the sea, in the wintry avenue, with the withered leaves dropping at my feet, and I heard again the voice of my dream,

answering my demand that in all Miss Mildred desired concerning me she might be thwarted—

“Take thy wish, though it be evil, and watch over the dead like Mildred. In the garland is his name.”

Yes, I would refuse to marry Sir Stephen, but he should not laugh at me with Alice—he should not scornfully reject *me*, as he had boasted he would.

“Adorable creature,” broke in Mr. Buttercombe. [In the early part of this century, when sickly sentiment was the fashion, buttercups like this said, “Adorable creature”—they took that from the novels.] “Adorable creature,” he said, in a voice unctuous with delight at his own eloquence, “how can you be so cruel as not to answer me?”

“Sir, it was simply because I did not hear you,” I replied.

“Not hear me!” he exclaimed; “that’s

impossible; young ladies, if deaf to all else, always hear such speeches as those."

"If you will have the goodness to say it over again, Mr. Buttercombe, I will endeavour to answer you."

My tormentor blushed red at this; and, half smiling, I now compared him to a shrimp, boiled pale, walking on his hind-spindles, with eyes more goggle, and further out of his head, than ever shrimps were yet.

"Excuse me," he said, drawing himself up with an attempt at dignity; "you appoint me too hard a task. I have not the courage."

Then apparently thinking I should be quite crushed by this speech, he smiled benignly, and hastened to add some of his softest butter.

"A manly mind cannot harbour anger against one of the weaker sex. Lovely woman is privileged, beauty is always cruel. Miss Treganowen, I *will* say it again. You are the most charming, the most fascinating

of your sex, and I am your humblest adorer."

This insincere and ridiculous speech, evidently taken from the weakest novel in the Exeter circulating garbage, completely upset my gravity, and my laughter rang out into the old street merrily, quite precluding all possibility of reply.

"I like silence better than ridicule," said Mr. Buttercombe, in an aggrieved tone. He said this with clasped hands, and a face of such affected agony that I could only laugh the more; whereupon he seized my hand, and placed it on his arm, triumphantly marching me along like the captive of his valiant bow and spear.


At this moment I looked up, and met the astonished gaze of Sir Stephen Tremaine. He had come from the cathedral by another road, and had certainly purposely chosen this way in order to confront us. In passing, he regarded me earnestly, as we look at a

person whom we half recognise, then, with a glance at my shambling companion by no means complimentary, and a slight raising of his hat to me, he passed on.

"Now, does he know me or not?" I cried mentally; and, irritated beyond endurance by the buttercup's absurdities, I snatched my hand from his arm, and permitted him to see something of my spirit in my eyes and voice.

"Mr. Buttercombe, allow me to wish you good morning. Here is the milliner's. I shall remain here a long while. I am going to try on all the shop."

But no! it could never enter into that yellow head, fluttering there in the wind like a daffodil on a very shaky stem, that any young lady did not want him—him! Antony Amery Buttercombe, only son and heir of Sir Mannamead Buttercombe, of Mannamead Hall! Why, all the young ladies for miles around wanted him! So he



only smiled inanely, and followed me into the shop, saying—

“I shall be so delighted to see you try on all the pretty things, that I really must give myself the pleasure of remaining.”

And he remained, while I vainly strove to tire him out by putting on in succession every feathered turban, and hat, and bonnet the establishment contained. But he only went into equal raptures with the milliner, and really seemed more and more delighted every time I turned my face towards him, and with mock gravity demanded his opinion. At length his evident admiration, and a certain change in his manner, made a sudden curiosity dart into my mind like a flash. I determined on a wicked experiment, which his provoking conduct to me that morning seemed quite to justify. He had dared to make love to me, *not feeling it*, only desiring my fortune. What girl could

or would bear that? And he had inflicted his company on me this half-hour in an ungentlemanly and pertinacious manner against my wish, so I resolved if possible to make him remember this half-hour all his life long.

I changed my demeanour; I chatted and laughed till a bright colour flushed my cheeks, and a bright light flashed in my eyes; then I turned from caps and bonnets to wreaths, and flowers, and veils, permitting the milliner to arrange and re-arrange my hair as she pleased.

I instinctively knew that all buttercups adore black hair.

Poor Mr. Buttercombe! When my long black tresses fell to their whole luxuriant length, and the lady's dexterous fingers crowned them with a wreath of scarlet pomegranate, and turning, blushing, half-ashamed, I asked him what he thought of me, he was speechless. His reading

failed him entirely, and not a single sentence out of a novel would come to his help.

There was no difficulty in getting rid of him now. He obeyed my first hint with a meekness and alacrity which gave me the gratification of perceiving that he had forgotten my fortune altogether—that he didn't know, in fact, whether I had a penny. He only knew that I was beautiful, and that he himself was a miserable buttercup.


Perhaps you will think that all this was vile coquetry on my part, but if so you are mistaken: it was only *curiosity*. I was thinking of Stephen Tremaine all the while, and I simply wanted to test and gauge the power of my face. I wanted to know the limits of my new empire, that I might judge by this easy conquest, whether I could hope to win that more difficult battle, on which my mind was set. Maybe it was cruel and selfish to try experiments on a

canary, but I was punished for it in the end, and suffered more than he did.

Left alone now, I gathered up my hair in that weariness and sickness of the heart that follow upon vanity, and, after paying for all the foolish things I felt obliged to purchase to repay the milliner for her time and trouble, I walked drearily away. I had lost all hope of seeing Sir Stephen Tremaine now, but being too full of thought and vexation to bear my aunt's presence just yet, I determined on taking a long walk beyond the old city.

CHAPTER III.

I NEEDED the quiet of the green fields, and the stillness of those long Devonshire lanes embowered in foliage, with hedges covered with dripping, drooping verdure; so crossing the bridge that spans the Exe, I bent my steps towards the meadows by the river side. For some way I had companions in children playing on the banks, in women drawing water, in labourers cutting and binding fagots from the hedges, but at length, on entering a wood, traversed by a footpath, I found myself utterly alone. And I was glad to be alone, for the sight of Sir Stephen Tremaine had filled my heart with conjecture and trouble. The stillness of the wood was beautiful to me; it was late



autumn, and rarely even a bird disturbed with gentle rustle the crisp and changing leaf that fell softly on the moss as I passed. I walked on dreamily with a hushed step, and my mind gradually fell into a calmer state, as, losing the hot rush of vanity and trouble that had filled it in the city, it turned wistfully back to old days, old walks at Clifton, when Hubert Spencer, whose name to me was another word for peace, was ever by my side.

Softly, softly the leaves fell, and the shadows of the short day, lengthening on my path, crept quietly around me, when suddenly the stillness was broken by a sharp cry. I looked around greatly startled, but no living creature was in sight. What, then, was the meaning of this sound? As if to answer me it came again, but, standing still as I was now, I heard it more distinctly.

“Help! help!”

I have told you I was no coward, though my nervous temperament often made me appear like one ; so now it only cost me a moment's hesitation ere I hastened in the direction of the cry. Slight as I was, and dressed as I was in the scanty fashion of the day, I crept through the wood noiseless as a hare. I never stopped to consider what the cry might be, but sped on swiftly, till, when I least expected it, I suddenly reached the spot whence the sounds proceeded, and found myself in the presence of two men—one lying on the ground senseless, the other leaning over him rifling his pockets.

I had never anticipated such a sight as this. Two urchins quarrelling, a girl frightened by a stray horse or cow—this, if anything, was all that had passed through my thought, and now, struck with horror, I leant for a moment, faint and terrified, against a tree. The robber, intent on plunder, had neither seen nor heard my

arrival, but at this instant, in rising from his stooping posture, his evil eyes met mine full in the face, as my slight figure, like a spirit, stood confronting him.

His face blanched to a ghastly pallor, his lips shook visibly. "Alicia!" he muttered in a strange, unnatural whisper. Then he drew a pistol from his breast, and pointed it towards me with trembling finger.

"Paul Polwhele," said I—for I knew him—"put down your murderous hand! I am Esther Treganowen."

"Curse you!" answered the ruffian; "it's you who have led me into this business. Why didn't you see my sign in the cathedral? And why have you followed me here, like the blighting, blasting, withering ghost of the only creature I'm afraid of?"

"The moment I saw you pursuing your vocation," said I, calmly, "I knew you, but it was not likely I should recognise you in

a church. I saw no sign you may have made there, neither have I followed you here. What do you mean by saying I have brought you into this crime?"

"I wanted money," he answered sullenly, "and I couldn't wait to ask you for it. When I saw you turn into a finery shop with a popinjay, I knew I might stand for hours in the street in vain. Do you suppose, because I am a miserable devil, that therefore I am never hungry, nor thirsty, nor tired, nor cold? I tell you I am so famished that I dodged this fine bird into the wood, and gave him a pat on the head, a little too hard, I fear. Why," he continued, turning on me with a fearful oath, "didn't you see me when I beckoned to you in that old building? You might have saved me from this."

I shuddered at his words, I shuddered at his presence, but my terror of him was not like the terror of my childish days, and in


my anxiety for his victim I ventured to draw a step nearer.

"I am sorry for you," said I, "and you are welcome to what money I have. God grant you have not killed the man!"

I came forward now, and looked at him with a sick anguish of fear and compassion. He was lying with his face on the grass hidden from my view, and his figure appeared so motionless and dead that my horror increased every instant, in spite of the necessity I felt of dominating over my ruffian uncle by calmness and courage. My feverish anxiety to render the poor sufferer some assistance helped also to banish cowardice.

"Miserable man!" I cried, "go instantly and get some aid for this gentleman, whom you have nearly murdered."

"Look here," answered Paul, as he stooped down anxiously, "a crack on the head doesn't kill a man; he is only sense-



less; you needn't talk about murder. Have you got some salts or other female fidgets with you? If so, you can stay and attend to him if you like, but as for me, I must cut it sharp. Where can I see you this evening?"

"Nowhere," said I firmly, "unless you return this gentleman's purse to his pocket. In that case here is mine, and I will give you more money to-night, at eleven, in the bower at the end of Miss Polwhele's garden."

Paul Polwhele looked at me irresolutely for a moment, then he flung a heavy pocket-book and purse on the grass, and picked up mine, which I had placed on the ground, that he might not touch my hand.

"Now go for help!" I cried excitedly, as I once more stooped over the prostrate figure on the grass.

"*I* go for help!" said Paul. "Do you think I'm mad? And leave him alone; don't put a finger on him till I'm out of

sight; a touch would bring him to his senses now. Do you want to put a halter round my neck?"

In intense disgust, indignation, horror, I watched the ruffian slink away through the wood, then I knelt down by the wounded gentleman, and lifting his head gently—I confess in an agony of shrinking fear—I saw, pale and senseless, the features of Sir Stephen Tremaine.

"Stop!" I screamed after the robber, who was fast creeping away.

He obeyed me after a few moments' hesitation, returning in a slouching, reptile manner that truly made my blood run cold.

"This gentleman is not dead," said I, with pale lips, "but he wants instant help. Go, or if there is danger in your going, send to the London Inn, and order Miss Mildred's carriage and servants to come hither to me with all speed. Let them bring a surgeon with them. And now one

word more. If you were not my own mother's brother I would make this wood ring instantly with shrieks of murder, and I would denounce you to the first comer; as it is, I will screen you, if I can. But disobey my directions at your peril: you will know how to take care of your own safety. Go! the sight of you is driving me mad."

Paul Polwhele clenched his hands and looked at me in lowering hatred.

"Take care!" he hissed between his teeth; "I could do you a worse turn, if I liked, than any you could do me."

Then, as I made no answer, he crept sullenly but quickly away, leaving me alone in the wood with the breathing but senseless form of the man around whom I had woven so many dreams, not one of which bore even a shadowy likeness to this strange and terrible reality.

In all the dramas and romances I had

ever read, the hero had always performed prodigies of valour, overpowering the villain, and coming off victorious in spite of all odds. Here the hero lay with a broken head, very decidedly defeated by the villain, while, in spite of his captaincy and valour, he had also very lustily shouted for help; and the heroine, far from feeling her position of succourer to be either romantic or pleasant, was painfully bewailing her near relationship to the scoundrel.

I cannot tell why it was that, as I knelt by Sir Stephen's side in the wood alone, my thoughts took this ridiculous turn. All my fear passed away, and a succession of ludicrous ideas visited my brain rapidly. I ridiculed him, I ridiculed myself, I drew mental caricatures without end, I quizzed my position unmercifully. Yet through it all, with that double power of thought we seem to possess, I watched him anxiously as he slowly came back to his senses; I

dipped my handkerchief in the brook near, and applied it to his temples; and I wiped the blood from the cruel crack among his dark curls, which Paul's villainous blow had made. But as I did all this, every atom of the romantic fancy I had for him fled clear out of my brain. Had I divined then the secrets of woman's nature, I should have known, that this disdain of Sir Stephen's misfortune proved his image had never gained the stronghold of my heart. Love leans with watchful tenderness, with motherly pity, over not only the sorrows, but even the sins of the beloved one. Fancy requires her idol to be decked ever in his best tinsel, else she turns away disgusted, scornful, or weary.

At length Sir Stephen slowly opened his eyes, and gazed round in a bewildered way. On seeing me standing at a little distance, blushing and confused—for my ridicule,

my scorn, my self-possession vanished with the first twinkle of his eyelash—he essayed to spring to his feet, but, faint and giddy, was fain to content himself by remaining seated on the grass.

“You had better not attempt to rise,” said I, steadying my trembling voice; “you have been faint.”

“I feel so still,” he answered, as a slight flush suffused his face. “I remember now—a scoundrel attacked me here a moment ago. What has become of him?”

“It is many moments ago, and he is far out of sight by this time,” I responded.

A still deeper flush covered Sir Stephen’s brow.

“And did he run away after robbing me? And how came you here? Pray explain what occurred.”

It was my turn to flush deeply now. How could I answer him? how tell a word of the truth? Sin, like the plague, spreads

its infection all round, and, touched by Paul's crime, I shrank within myself as I felt I must prevaricate or conceal all my part in this matter. Could I say, "I am the robber's niece, and I will not betray him?" My blood tingled as I thought of this shameful kinship, and perhaps some touch of scorn or contempt (I meant it for myself) rang out in my voice as I answered—

"I heard cries for help—I was walking at a little distance from this spot—I ran hither, and found you lying on the ground senseless."

Sir Stephen's cheek grew hot and red at my tone.

"I had neither stick, nor pistol, nor other means of defence," he said; and when the ruffian attacked me I was so taken by surprise that I had not time to defend myself. I shouted, hoping the labourers in the fields beyond might hear me. Nevertheless, I gave the fellow a

heavy blow before he drew forth his pistol and stunned me. And so when you ran up you found me lying here like a helpless simpleton?"

"You were lying there," I answered, smiling, "and I don't see how you could avoid being helpless, considering what a fearful blow you had received."

"That's true, and I feel very giddy still. I suppose the thief made off the moment he had robbed me, otherwise you would have seen him?"

Again I blushed crimson, and Sir Stephen fixed his eyes on my face with evident wonder at my confusion. Still I was not bound to answer his questions.

"Are you sure you are robbed?" I asked, carelessly.

"He demanded my purse loudly enough, so I presume he took it after dealing me that butcherly blow. The scoundrel! I should like to meet with him again!" And

Sir Stephen's eyes flashed fire, and his hand clenched itself on the grass. "I should know the man again anywhere. I'll not leave Exeter till I have lodged him in gaol."

I felt myself turn pale, and my voice was a little faint as I remarked—

"You had better see if you have been robbed."

Sir Stephen put his hand in his pocket and drew forth a morocco case.

"Thank goodness the fellow has not taken that!" he said, softly. "My purse and pocket-book are gone," he added aloud.

"Try the other pocket, Sir Stephen."

"Ah, you know me!" he said hurriedly.

"I always keep my purse and book in this pocket—no! positively here they are in the other! Well, that is very singular! Could the robber have run away on hearing you approach? What a mercy he did not remain to see who my slight deliverer was!

A young girl, helpless, alone, he might have murdered you! Really, young lady, I am deeply indebted to you, and at the same time I am sadly annoyed that you should have incurred danger and risk for the sake of a fellow who certainly ought to have been able to defend himself. Surely one gentleman should be a match for two thieves. I declare I would give the scamp my purse to have the pleasure of cracking his skull as he has cracked mine. And you know me?" he repeated, gazing at me very curiously. "I remember, and yet I do not remember you. Stop! where have I had the pleasure of seeing you before?"

"You saw me in the cathedral this morning," I answered, with a slight smile.

Sir Stephen still bent his eyes on me with the same earnest gaze.

"I remembered that," he said, "five minutes ago, only I did not like to mention it, fearing that—that, in fact, I might have

made myself disagreeable by looking at you a little more than—— But really you must, after all, be used to seeing people eager to look twice on your face after having seen it once.”

I made no reply to this compliment, but availed myself of my own silence to gather all my senses about me.

“It was not that,” continued Sir Stephen, “because even in the cathedral I was struck with the idea that I had seen you before. You appear to know me; will you not help me?” he concluded.

“Not in the least,” said I, bursting into a ringing laugh. “I doubt if you ever *saw* me in your life till we met in the cathedral.

I said this, feeling it to be true, for his eyes were full of jaundice and dislike when they fell mockingly on my face in the wintry avenue, and I had hidden it in the shadow when we met in the moonlit road going to Clifton.

As I laughed, Sir Stephen's eyes suddenly brightened.

"I have it!" he cried. "You are like, strangely like, a young lady I know. Look here! how singular!"

He opened the morocco case, and showed me the miniature of a young girl of about sixteen. As the smiling face flashed before my eyes, I no longer wondered at his exclamation. An instant before, as I had stood gaily laughing, it might have been counted almost a portrait of myself; but now, as the blood mounted to cheek and temple in a full blaze of jealousy and anger, the likeness died away, or remained only as a mockery, showing a total dissimilarity in all things save some trick of shape and feature.

"Do you think me like this young lady?" I said, coldly.

"You were, a moment ago."

"That is scarcely possible," I answered, carelessly. "How can I be like a person

I have never seen in my life? Is she pretty?"

"Judge for yourself." And he placed Alice Weston's portrait in my hand.

I strove hard to hide my agitation—my trembling fingers, my burning cheeks, my quivering lips, as I bent over the lovely face presented to my view, and felt the hot flood of old hatreds and jealousies rush like a fire to my heart. A little while ago, and I almost disdained Sir Stephen Tremaine, and counted his love a toy scarcely worth striving for; now it seemed again the greatest prize a woman could win.

With a curious shudder, half fear, half superstition, I acknowledged to myself that Alice Weston's face bore a singular resemblance to my own, and I wondered if people born to mutual hate and injury wore always a fateful likeness one to the other.

I perceived with silent joy that my beauty did not suffer in comparison with Alice.

The weird looks of my childhood arose from sickness, terror, solitude ; these removed, Nature restored to me the face she had originally given, and more, for the health, home, and happiness bestowed by Hubert Spencer had crowned me with a triple dower, and wealth of beauty with which the smiling prettiness of this picture could scarcely vie.

I returned the portrait with a proud smile, and lifting my eyes to Sir Stephen Tremaine's, permitting him to look for a moment at their full light, I said, carelessly—

“A very pretty, smiling little face. Is this lady your sister or cousin?”

With his gaze fixed earnestly on my face, Sir Stephen dropped the miniature into his pocket—carelessly I thought—and rising, said, hastily—

“She is not my sister or cousin.”

“Your betrothed, perhaps?”

“My intended!” he exclaimed. “No, indeed! I wish I could show you a picture

of my intended." And a grim smile passed over his face, followed by a sigh.

My hand beneath the folds of my mantle clenched itself involuntarily, and even my foot on the grass partook of the movement, yet, nerving all my courage, my voice scarcely trembled as I spoke.

"Is your intended wife, then, still more beautiful than that picture?" I said.

Sir Stephen burst into a laugh of derision, and then suddenly checked himself.

"I did not say I was engaged to marry any one, but certainly the person I was then thinking of was ugly as a witch when I last saw her. Really it makes me so uncomfortable to talk of her that I think we'll change the subject."

"You are quite right," I answered, laughing. "I am a perfect stranger to you, and I would not advise you to divulge all your secrets so frankly. Do you know I have learned a great deal already? You

are engaged to some hideous old frump, whom you are mean enough to court for her money"—I could not help the flash in my eyes, that met his with a blaze of scorn—"and you are in love with a pretty and poor girl, whom you have not the courage to marry."

"You are mistaken—on my word and honour, you are mistaken!" exclaimed Sir Stephen, anxiously. "Why think so meanly of me?"

For some moments my quick ear had caught the rumble of a carriage, and, infinitely relieved by this approaching break to an embarrassing interview, I was able to answer him with careless ease.

"It matters very little what I think of you, Sir Stephen, since, in all probability, we shall never meet again. I hear the carriage coming which I ordered to meet me here. I shall be very happy to lend it to you, if you will permit me; you are not

in a fit plight to walk to Exeter, even if you were able, and you really need the aid of a surgeon——”.

“To bind up my inglorious wound,” he added, in a vexed tone. “You place me under infinite obligations. May I not at least know the name of the young lady to whom I owe so much?”

“No, indeed,” I answered, quickly.

“But you appear to know *me*,” he persisted.

“Is not your name marked on the handkerchief with which I bathed your forehead?” I asked, as I moved away a step or two.

“We cannot part like this!” he cried, following me eagerly. “Pray tell me your name. I must see you again.”

“And why *must* you see me again?” I asked, turning towards him suddenly.

“To thank you,” he answered, “for your courage and kindness. I fell among

thieves, and have you not been my good Samaritan?"

"You owe me very little," said I, coldly. "There was no need of courage where there was nothing to fear, and as for kindness, surely it is a very small thing to stand by a fainting man for a moment or two till he recovers."

"You have done more than that, as my handkerchief and your own testify," he responded.

"Well, what does it matter," said I, moving rapidly away. "You will find the carriage at the entrance to the wood. Farewell, Sir Stephen."

"Oh, do listen to me!" cried the young man. Then he broke into a little laugh, which fell musically on my ear, and changed his tone of entreaty for one of frank openness. "Let me confess it all," he said; "I am mortified to death. You hear me screaming for help, like a frightened school-

boy, and you find me stretched under a tree with a broken head, like a simpleton who had neither sense nor courage to defend himself. Oh, my dear young lady, can any man's vanity stand such things? Let me, I entreat you, have an opportunity——”

“For showing me your fascinating and noble qualities,” said I, laughing too.

The half-impertinent emphasis I placed on the words brought a flush to his handsome face; his vanity was irritated to the quick; and I believe from that moment he resolved to make me like him.

It was a dangerous resolve, but it is one which young gentlemen in their vanity are very apt to make, forgetting that their destined victim may, in her turn, have made a resolve also—forgetting, in fact, that two can play equally at the noble game of heartless coquetry.

Ah! we, as others before us, both found this true——“*Le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle.*”

"You are half-right," said Sir Stephen, as the flush died out of his cheek; "I am certainly anxious to win your good opinion. You owe me a chance for showing myself in a better light than that in which you have seen me to-day. You will permit me to call at your house? Have you a father? a mother? Do you live in Exeter?"

"Stop!" I cried, "you travel too fast. I do not live at Exeter. I am here on a visit."

"Where?" he exclaimed.

"You recollect that young gentleman walking with me to-day?" said I, uttering this at random, merely to gain time to think.

"That odious young Buttercombe! I was at college with him. Are you staying with his delectable mother?"

At this moment a weather-beaten, round, Devonshire face peered at us between the trees, and a voice shouted to me—

"If you please, miss, I can't bring the chaise up no nearer."

I ran towards the postillion ere Sir Stephen had time to detain me, and was rejoiced to find he was a stranger whom I had never seen before. I guessed at once that the fear of seeing Pryor had induced Paul to order a chaise at some other inn, and this was not Miss Mildred's carriage now awaiting me.

"Please, miss, where's the dead man?" said the postillion. "I s'pose me and Jim can carry 'un. The p'erson as ordered the chaise said there'd bin a accident—a gen'leman had hurt hisself out shooting, and a young lady was with 'un and we were to drive to this yur wood, and pick 'un up."

"It is all right," I answered; "but the gentleman is not dead; he is only hurt."

At this instant, Sir Stephen, looking pale and faint, joined us, and feeling really sorry, I walked by his side, listening to his profuse

thanks, till we reached the chaise. A rapid glance showed me that the damp, limp man—who somehow gave me the idea of a greengrocer just dressed for a funeral—standing at the door was as strange to me as the postillion, and I was delighted that this happy chance aided my plot and precluded all possibility of Sir Stephen's discovering my name. He would have handed me into the chaise, but I drew back.

“I am going to walk to Exeter,” I said.

“But the chaise is yours,” he exclaimed, in great vexation. “You told me you had ordered it to meet you here; if, then, you object to going with me, it is for me to walk.”

“You don't seem much fit for walking, sir,” said the limp man.

A sudden faintness and giddiness with which Sir Stephen was seized prevented all further argument. He consented to ride, but he found me inflexible when, with all

his eloquence, he would have induced me to accompany him. Such a drive would have been beyond my strength, and a single tear in his presence would lose me all chance of victory.

Sir Stephen gave me his hand, with an air of great chagrin, as he entered the chaise. "I complete the contempt you must feel for me," he said, "by my want of gallantry in forcing you to walk home, whilst I coolly take your carriage."

"Look at your condition," I answered, changing my bantering tone for one of softness; "you are faint and sick, and, moreover, you would frighten every one you met; your face and neckcloth are covered with blood."

"What a hideous object I must be!" he said, ruefully.

"Drive to a surgeon's at once," I replied, kindly.

"I wish there was anything I could do

to show the fairy who has succoured me that I am grateful," said Sir Stephen, bending towards me, while the damp greengrocer respectfully stood aside.

A sharp, sudden thought of Paul brought a painful blush to my face.

"Do you not think," said I, in a low voice, "that the act of attacking you, and not taking your money, looks like insanity? These men believe you have met with an accident; why not let every one think so, and leave this poor desperate wretch alone?"

"You are anxious to save my reputation; you fancy I shall be laughed at if I confess I was not a match for a single thief. I will do anything you wish as regards the man, except resist the temptation of shooting him the next time we meet; meanwhile he may go scot-free, since you seem to sympathize with him. Perhaps you even think he deserves a reward for knocking me on the head?"

My face burned like fire, but I answered in the same jesting tone—

“Not quite that, but if you will leave him alone till the shooting time you will oblige me.”

“Certainly, I will,” he answered, with a look of slight surprise. “But I do not promise you to tell any stories of accident. My reputation is not so mean, I hope, but that I can afford to own I was knocked down by an unexpected blow from a ruffian. I shall confess all my loss of presence of mind, my broken head, my shouts for help, and all the rest of it, and if any one chooses to ridicule me, he will find I am not always a sort of ‘Ethelred the Un-ready.’”

I had never liked Sir Stephen so well as I did when he said this. I gave him my hand again, and thanked him for yielding to my “whim,” as I called it, about the robber.

"I shall certainly see you again," he said, as the chaise drove off.

I watched it till it was out of sight; then, turning back into the wood, I flung myself on the moss in the loneliest spot I could find, and wept bitterly.

Those who know anything of the human heart will guess the sources of my tears. They were all bitter, every one. By my mother and Paul they came through shame, mortification, and the anguish of pride and honour soiled and broken; by the unknown Alice they welled up through the hate and jealousy of long smouldering years; by Stephen they reached me passionately in anger, revenge for scorn, and a hot resolve to make him, at least, suffer for me what I had felt for him; and lastly, for myself they dropped down in the salt bitterness of diminished self-esteem, and if with these mingled warm drops of pity for my father, even they could scarcely soften the agony

of contempt, the shrinking from myself, which I felt.

Was Paul to make me lie and steal for him, as he made my mother? and could even all my love and pity for my father justify me in such a course? Then I felt this was not a question of reason and expedience, or even of love and pity; it was simply a question of possibility. *Could* I do this?—would my nature let me do it? I answered *No* with all the force of my soul, and then, in my passionate misery, I flung the tears from my face, and beat and bruised my hand against the tree upon whose shadow I rested. Nevertheless, although I thus indignantly resolved not to pollute my lips with falsehood for Paul Polwhele, I was too dazzled by the glare of my own imagination to recede from the path I had entered on with regard to Stephen Tremaine. “All is fair in love and war,” I murmured, blinding myself by

a sophism ; and in very truth I could not give up my plot. I had dreamed of this day for so many years ; I could not let him, like a shadow, escape me now. If he had not shown me that he carried with him everywhere the hateful picture of that girl, whose phantom had haunted my jealous heart since childhood, why, then, perhaps—

Tears dropped down fast upon my thought, and broke the thread of it, and the evening dew, and many a yellow leaf, fluttering softly, fell on me ere I arose and walked slowly home.

CHAPTER IV.

It was late when I returned; but I pass over all Miss Priscilla's wonder at my long absence, and all Jenifer's truer anxiety, and I do not touch with one drop of ink that agreeable little tea-party in the evening, where all the buttercourses vied with each other in feeding me with butter and honey, and my poor admirer lost himself in depths of sentiment and romance, whence he emerged covered with confusion and yellow blushes, while his mother relieved her maternal heart by giving me a profusion of hard kisses, which really bruised my cheeks.

I leave all this untold to turn to my interview that night with Paul Polwhele.

Stock House was hushed in silence, when

with stealthy step I descended the stairs, and found myself in front of the stout door leading into the grounds. But not all my strength sufficed to undo the great bars that stretched across it so baffled; heated and nervous, I crept into the drawing-room, and after some further bruising of my slight fingers, I unbarred shutter and window, and leaving my candle behind a large screen, stepped out into the garden. This was the first time in my life that I found myself the sole waking inmate of a slumbering house. The deathly stillness had chilled me with awe, and the soft sound of my own footfall, as I crept by the closed doors of sleepers, sounded to my ears ghostly and strange. Added to this chill of solitude was the intense loathing I felt of my act, and now as I stepped out into the free air, my disgust and hatred towards the man for whom I was prowling through my aunt's house, like a thief in the night, so overpowered me, that

I stamped my foot on the ground, and clenched my hands together in a passion of indignation and shame. Then the thought that I was here by my own free will, and in furtherance of my own resolves, nerved me, and I walked on with a firm step towards the summer-house, hiding my figure from the face of the pale moon behind shrubs and trees. Still my heart beat loudly as the tall, burly figure of a man stood suddenly in my path.

"You have kept me waiting," he growled, "till my patience turned to a devil within me. I believe I should have throttled you, if every atom of fire hadn't been drawn out of my blood by watching your white face coming creeping, creeping along like a corpse in the moonlight. Couldn't you walk faster, instead of gliding upon a man like a ghost?"

I led the way to the summer-house without answer, and flung myself on the bench.

I was fearful Paul would place himself near me ; but I was mistaken—he stood against the doorway, leaning his strong hand on the trellis surrounding the porch.

“Let us go to business at once,” he said fiercely. “What money have you brought me?”

His words shook my nerves from head to foot, but I was not come hither to play the coward—I was come to seize the first clue that should lead me to Miss Mildred's secret; and out of this thought I plucked courage.

“Paul Polwhele,” I said, “the hateful tie of relationship between us gives you no claim upon me. I recognise no right of yours to demand any help from my hands. This morning I *purchased* that gentleman's purse from you with my own, and now I tell you plainly I will not give you a penny; you may murder me if you like, but on my table I have left a full description of you,

with the particulars of our interview to-day, and my intention to meet you here to-night."

A rustle among the leaves on the trellis told me Paul was startled by my tone.

"I'm not going to murder you," he said gruffly, "but if you won't help me, why come here to meet a desperate man?"

"Because you may have something to sell which I wish to buy."

"Halloo!" exclaimed Paul, "I don't keep any jewellery or any other swag about me: I have nothing to sell you."

"You can sell me the secret of the red room at Treval."

My whisper passed through the night into his ear, and he staggered beneath it. In the moonlight I saw his hand tremble as he clung to the trellis for support.

"I know nothing of it," he said hoarsely—"there is no secret."

"Have you forgotten what you said to me at Bath? You told me to ask Miss

Mildred for the secret, but I might as well ask the dead—she will never tell it.”

Paul came forward a step, and laid his hand on the rustic table which stood between us.

“Ask the dead,” he said; “the living will never tell you.”

“Some one shall,” I answered firmly. “Paul Polwhele, will you tell me this secret or not?”


“What do you want to do with it?” he asked, evasively.

“That is my affair, not yours.”

“You want to injure Miss Mildred; I’ll never help you to do that. I have flung Lucy off a hundred times, when she has wheedled me to do her a mischief.”

“And why do *you* befriend Miss Mildred?” I asked, surprised.

“Because she has never injured me; she knows things of me that would hang me any day, and she keeps silent.”



I hesitated a moment, and then I resolved to risk even my life to gain my purpose.

"But *I* will not be silent," I said, in a firm, low tone. "I will go to-morrow to the nearest justice, and tell him what I know of you. It is nothing to me that you are my mother's brother—I should be doing her good service if I got you hanged."

Paul Polwhele drew a long, heavy breath, and brought his face close to mine; his eyes gleamed with savage fury. "It is well for you," he hissed, "that you have left that paper on your table. Who and what are you, girl?"

My heart stood still with fear, but I had resolved to play out a brave part, and I did it.

"I am a Treganowen," I said, steadying my voice to a tone of calm contempt. "Don't you know the proverb, 'Love is strong and hate is fierce, like a Treganowen?' I am not afraid of you, Paul Polwhele; you will

have to tell me your secret now, not for money, but to save your neck from the halter.

"Esther Treganowen, you are my niece," said the robber, "and it is hard for a man to be talked to thus by his own blood."

A strange wild pathos rang out in his voice which touched me.

"I have no wish to injure you," I answered, "but I want you fully to understand that I am not to be robbed and held in subjection like my mother. This is our final interview, and you have received your last penny from me, since you refuse now to sell me the information I require."

"Stop!" said Paul softly, as I rose to leave. "How much money do you offer me?"

"I will give you fifty guineas," I replied.

"Have you got them with you?" he whispered greedily.

"I knew my uncle was a robber. I brought no money here with me."

He drew back his evil face, which had nearly touched mine, and bent it in silence on his hand for a full minute. When he raised it, pallid in the moonlight, there was an indescribable change in its expression.

"Esther," he said, "I cannot do it. I took a solemn oath never to reveal this secret."

"To Miss Mildred, I suppose?"

"No; to a woman who is dead—to Alicia Tremaine."

I was silent, but my heart beat audibly.

"Esther," he continued, "I was that unhappy woman's bitterest enemy; her miseries and her death she owed alike to me."

I shrank away from him with a chill of horror.

"I thought you were innocent of that crime," I murmured.

He scarcely appeared to hear me.

"Do not ask me to break my oath to the dead," he continued. "Ask me for my own history, and you will find in that a secret well worth your money. Listen, Esther—you are like Alicia Tremaine; had you been living with her ghost, or her son, or her mother, you could not have grown more like her. It is as if her shadow had passed over you and left some trace of itself on your face. But for this I should have struck you down twice to-night; no thought of Lucy held me back, but with that strange shadow of Alicia on you I was afraid."

My deadly terror almost paralysed my heart, but I hid it bravely, and answered in a light tone—

"I have not been living with Alicia's ghost; I have been with Mrs. Spencer and her son."

Paul struck his hand on the table with a heavy curse.

"That's it!" he said. "Is your father

mad that he sends you there? I hope young Spencer will never come out of the Austrian prison where he languishes."

A burning flush covered my face, and I burst into a torrent of indignant words, but Paul interrupted me coolly.

"You do not understand what you are saying, but I know what I say and what I do. I met Hubert Spencer once as he was riding at night from Treganowen, and the moment I saw his face my pistol was pointed at his heart, but it went off too soon—I only wounded him."

I rose, sick with pain and fear.

"Stand aside, miserable assassin," I cried, "and let me pass you! I cannot remain another instant in your presence."

"Is that the way you thank me for shooting at Hubert Spencer?" asked Paul sullenly.

"Thank you!" I cried aghast.

"Yes; there is no man whom you have

so much reason to wish dead as that man," he answered.

I paused in amazement, my whole soul recoiling at his words. I could not speak; renouncing my late purpose, my wish now was concentrated in the one desire to escape from the ruffian's presence.

"Let me pass!" I cried furiously.

I got by him, and should have fled up the garden, but one sentence from his lips arrested my flight, and rooted me to the spot as though he had power to turn me to stone.

"Hubert Spencer is your cousin," said Paul. "As I live, he is your mother's brother's son."

Struck with faintness, sickened, astonished by his words, I could only gasp forth—

"Your son!—is he yours?"

I trembled for his answer, and my blood retreated to my heart, left my face pale and cold as marble.

"Ah, my story is worth your fifty pounds now, isn't it?" said Paul sulkily. "It is my turn to make terms, I think; and my first condition is, that I have the money beforehand. Count it down at once, and I'll send you the story, all written out clean and fair, or else I'll meet you down at that thundering old dungeon Treval, and tell it there."

I strove with all my power to change his resolve, but I could not get a word more from him, so I was fain to give way and trust to his word, which he gave with a ruffian oath, that he would deal fairly with me.

"I am frozen," he said, in answer to my entreaties; "the cursed moon and your white face have chilled me to death; a gallon of brandy would not give me the courage to tell the story now."

Yielding to his sullen will, seeing it useless to combat it further, I crept back to

the house, and took my purse from its hiding-place. Then on the window-sill I counted out fifty guineas, and beckoned to Paul to take them up.

"I am trusting to your word," said I quietly. "You see I believe there is some good in you still."

"My word is as good as yours," answered Paul. "I won't cheat you. If I were not a poor devil, without bread, bed, or roof-tree, I would say, 'Esther, keep your money, and when I have told you my history, give me your cheek to kiss, and own that the same blood warms our veins;' that's all I'd ask of you, girl."

He dashed his hand across his eyes roughly, and sprang away without a word of farewell.

Moved in spite of myself I fastened the shutters with trembling hand, then reached my room noiselessly, and destroyed the papers I had left on my table, written that

night while waiting for Jenifer's tardy slumbers. This done, I flung myself quickly into bed, and slept as if there was nothing else left me to do but sleep, sleep for ever.

It was late when I awoke, and I found the house in strange confusion. The Miss Bolters, and the Miss Colters, who slept three in a bed, had seen a ghost—a tall, pale creature in white, who glided by in sepulchral silence, but who certainly left rather a visible proof of her presence behind her, in the shape of a remarkable caricature of my aunt, Miss Priscilla Polwhele. Laughing at the whole story, I wondered at Jenifer's strong anger, as she snatched the drawing from the fattest Miss Bolter, and declared she had seen it a week ago in my portfolio, and the ghost was certainly some thief who had stolen it. Hearing this, I came forward, and although I had no recollection of having portrayed my aunt in such a ridiculous style, I was unwilling to let her

feelings be hurt by a sight of the obnoxious likeness, so I tore it up, and begged the girls, as a favour, to say nothing about this wandering ghost-artist to Miss Priscilla. In a day I had forgotten this silly vision, arising from the uneasy Bolter and Colter slumbers, but I saw it rankled in Jenifer's mind, and she was anxious to leave Stock House.

"Aw! my dear Miss Esther," she said, "I'm wisht as a raven in this gashly ould plaace, and I reckon I shall be wus when I get down to Treval. I sheant have no health en my bones, nor no peace en my sperrit, till I sees the docter again, or least-ways hears from 'un. I wish his bright eyes was here this minute. You've got something on your mind, Miss Esther, and one glint of his comforting faace would chase it away like snaw before the sun."

Ah! poor Jenifer little thought there was a kind of horror fallen between me and

Hubert now. The son of Paul Polwhele could never be to me again the dear friend he had been of old. Even my kindly remembrance of him in my heart was darkened by the assassin's image.

In the warm play of my imagination round Sir Stephen's figure the bright face of Hubert Spencer had often intruded like a reproach; this shadow was lifted from me now, and I felt free to follow my own fancies. The secret of our cousinship was doubtless always known to Hubert, and it accounted to me for all his kindness, his watchfulness, and affection. Nevertheless all my memories of him grew dimmed and dull in this new light of cousinhood; clouded, too, as it was, by the horrible thought of Paul.

I remembered that he had never named his father to me, and I no longer wondered at his silence. I shuddered as my imagination, piercing the depths of his heart,

painted to my mind all the anguish he must feel in such a parent—all the shame and horror he hid so gaily. Hence a sense of pain grew to me round Hubert's image, heightened by a half-unconscious feeling of disappointment that the love, the care I had deemed so freely given were in reality paid as a duty—a cousinly, brotherly duty which he felt he owed me, though shame for him through whom we were akin made him hide our relationship in his heart. Even his mother did not know it, I was sure; perhaps Paul had married her in a false name, and she was ignorant of all things relating to him. If so, her son was too merciful and kind ever to tell her. In all my thoughts at this period of my life, I always did Hubert justice; but, believing him to be Paul's son, I felt with pain that the very touch of his hand would be different to me now, and I turned from the dimmed picture of his once sunny face to

the radiant image of my laughing, happy, honoured kinsman, Sir Stephen Tremaine.

In a day or two I bade adieu to Miss Priscilla, and stepped into the carriage that was to bear me and Jenifer to Treval. As we journeyed on through the soft days over the hills and dales of Devonshire I leaned back silent on the cushions, my brain teeming with visions, my heart beating with the expectancy and hope of youth, and my mind still bent on the long-cherished purpose that had haunted me from childhood. When we had passed the Torpoint Ferry, and the wheels rolled over Cornish ground, I roused myself at times to look from the window, and my veins beat with a warmer glow, as in our ancient crosses, our old Celtic towns and villages, I recognised the vestiges of a civilization and Christianity swept away from all other parts of Britain by that great wave of heathenism which rushed in with the Saxons.

In leaving the legendary, time-worn soil of Cornwall I had been struck with the *newness* of all things in other parts of England. The places and people had for me such queer, fresh, odd names. To see the shops garnished with such patronymics as Smith, Brown, Robinson, where my childish eyes had been accustomed to read Eva, Rhodda, Tregarthen, or Peneluna, made me think myself in some new land only just finished.

Now, in returning to Cornwall, the antiquity of things struck me, and I felt as much out of England as though I were travelling in the East.

"Here's the sea, miss!" cried Jenifer joyfully, as the mighty roll of the Atlantic swept in gloriously upon the ear.

With a flush of delight I fixed my eyes upon the deep blue Cornish sea, nor turned my head away till we neared Treval; then, just as the last flash of the setting sun lit up the whole western front with a dying

flame, touching with a pale fire mullion and shield, carved imp and cherub, I bent eagerly from the window, and with hasty impatient glance scanned the lawn. The cedar-tree was cut down.

I missed it with a horrible sinking of the heart, and my pale lips recorded instantly a verdict of guilty against Miss Mildred.

CHAPTER V.

To my surprise we drove up to the north porch, and the great stately doors opened wide on their unaccustomed hinges to receive us. I felt this honour was done to me as the heiress of Treganowen and Treval, but a faint chill ran through my superstitious veins as I stepped over the spot where the body of Alicia Tremaine had rested.

Miss Admonitia, stately in black velvet, stood in the hall to receive me, and, taking me by the hand, led me into the south drawing-room, where my eyes rested on the fragile figure of Miss Mildred. She was dressed in ruby velvet, with stomacher of opal and diamond; a veil of point lace,

fastened on the brow by opal ornaments, covered her black hair. She sat near the fire, whose glow fell over her thin hands, and played quiveringly on her death-white face. A flush grew into her cheeks as I came forward; but whether this arose at sight of me, or whether it was only the shadow of the crimson logs, I could scarcely tell. She trembled as she rose to greet me, scanning my figure from head to foot. As she did so our eyes met, and mine fell before the look of pleading pain with which hers were filled.

Like the Israelitish prince in his chariot who turned and fled, crying, "Treason, O king!" so did I flee before my own purpose, which here, in sight of this worn face, crowned with the pale flame of the gleaming opal, took a shape of deep treachery, at which I bowed in shame.

As I stooped and kissed that white cheek—the shadow of the fire on it—I as plainly

said, "I will not hurt you, Miss Mildred," as though my lips had spoken the words.

Surely she understood me, for she sat down with a smile breaking over her pallor, and, holding me still by the hand, she said softly—

"You are very beautiful, Esther."

"I always thought she would be," remarked Admonitia, proudly. "Mildred, she reminds me of Alicia."

As she said this, Mildred's hand clasped mine tightly, her lips quivered, her eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, Admonitia!" she said, painfully. "Think of what you are saying. Esther is so young and lovely."

"She reminds me of Alicia Tremaine," interrupted Admonitia, with a marked accent, as though she spoke in disdain or bitterness.

Mildred rose hurriedly. "I must go and see Martha," she said a little wildly,

"Admonitia, take care of Esther the while. You are right — she has a manner, an accent, a something that reminds me of what Alicia was at her age. It is because you have a sympathetic face, Esther."

She left the room as she spoke, while her sister gazed after her like one who reproached herself for an unkindness. She sighed deeply as she turned to me.

"Do you find Mildred changed, Esther?" she said.

"She is wondrously lovely," I answered, "as she ever was. Hers is not a beauty years can touch."

And this was true. The marble face seemed — like marble — imperishable; the dark brows and lashes, the soft lustrous eyes, the exquisite fairness of the polished skin, time had passed over these, and stolen not a grace from their beauty.

"Then you do not think Mildred looks ill?" asked Admonitia, anxiously.


"Ill!" I exclaimed. "No; she was always pale; or if any colour came to her cheek it was like the glow in an alabaster lamp, when the fire is within, or like the rose shadow of a crimson curtain on a marble statue."

"You are right," said Admonitia, in a relieved tone. "Your presence will do Mildred good. We have been too sad and quiet here, Esther, of late, and she has talked gloomily—of death, of I know not what. Are you tired, child?" she added abruptly.

"Not at all," I answered. "You know, by your wish, I slept last night at Truro, and have only travelled ten miles to-day."

"That is well; so when we have had tea you must go and dress."

"Dress!" I cried, as at the same time I scanned Miss Admonitia's robe of velvet, her lace and diamonds, at all of which I



had slightly wondered, as also at Miss Mildred's rich attire.

"Yes, Esther; we give a ball to-night, and Mildred and I dressed an hour ago, that we might be ready to help you. Your dress is in your room; it came from a court dressmaker."

Amazement kept me silent, and in truth, on going to my room, I found Jenifer bending in wonder over a robe of pearly satin and lace.

"Make yourself beautiful, for Mildred wants you to please many people to-night," said Miss Admonitia.

On entering the ball-room, Miss Mildred took me by the hand, and introduced me to all the company as her adopted daughter, and I heard murmurs of admiration and whispers all around. There was a group of gentlemen standing near, and all these, on hearing my name, bent forward eagerly, save one, who, with a look of disdain and

annoyance on his face, continued to talk carelessly to his neighbour. That one was Sir Stephen Tremaine.

Flushed with the pride of beauty, glowing with emotion and the hope of victory, my face bore at that hour almost a supernatural loveliness; but I thought not of it then. As Miss Mildred went forward and laid her silken hand on Sir Stephen's arm, I sank back abashed and agitated. He turned instantly, and I saw the change that flashed into his eyes as he caught sight of me and darted forward.

"My fair incognita of the wood!" he cried.

"Miss Esther Treganowen," said Miss Mildred, softly, "my ward and heiress, Sir Stephen. As this ball is given to do honour to you and Esther, I think you had better dance the first cotillion together."

Before I had time to speak, Sir Stephen had taken my hand, and placed it on his

arm. He seemed like one amazed, and was scarcely less agitated than myself. Doubtless our romantic rencontre in the wood had laid hold of his imagination, and our meeting now, and my identity with the Esther he hated and dreaded, bewildered him. But, whatever his past feelings were, he wanted me to forget them.

"How mistaken I have been throughout!" he whispered eagerly. "Ah! why did you not tell me at Exeter who you were?"

"Because I knew you hated me, Sir Stephen."

"Do not speak of hatreds," he continued; "what shall I do to make you forget all my folly?"

I answered him I knew not what, but I thought of Alice Weston's picture, and exerted myself to please.

He was staying in the house, I found—how clever Miss Mildred was!—and before a fortnight was over I had forgotten that I

had promised myself the pleasure of *refusing* Sir Stephen Tremaine—I was thinking only of accepting him. The loneliness of a country house had thrown us so much together, that we seemed to have known each other for years, and many and many a laugh had rung out beneath the old trees, as we talked of his ancient contempt for the weird Esther, at whom he had scoffed in the wintry avenue at Treganowen.

And so a month went by, and he had never once touched upon that compact between my father and Miss Mildred, on which both our minds dwelt so often. At length, one day, as I sat alone in the narrow drawing-room looking out upon the bees' nest, a step came softly behind me, and, turning, I saw Sir Stephen, with flushed face and sparkling eyes.

"Esther," he said hurriedly, "I have been talking to Miss Mildred—oh, Esther, give me your hand!—say that all she hopes for

our happiness is your hope also. Esther!" —and in his agitation he threw his arm around me, and pressed me closely to him—"I have loved you from the moment I saw you in the cathedral. Speak! tell me it is not I only who love."

For one instant my head sank on his shoulder, then I roused myself from my weakness, and said sadly—

"Stephen, you are mistaken—you do not love me. Miss Mildred unworthily forces you to this course. If Alice Weston and I were *both* penniless, or both rich, you would choose her."

Sir Stephen drew back proudly.

"Esther," he said, "as Heaven is my witness, no thought of that odious fortune, which has cost me so much pain, came near my mind as I spoke to you. Since I have known you, I have forgotten it. And what is this about, Miss Weston? I knew her only as a pretty child, and talked to her

as a man would to a pretty child—that is all.”

“You have her picture,” I faltered.
“Give it to me if what you say be true.”

“Let me have your hand, then,” said Stephen, “else the exchange is not fair.”

Blushing crimson, I held out my hand, which he clasped in his, and then drew me gently to his side.

“And the picture?” I said, as with burning cheeks I received his first kiss.

“Foolish Esther!” he answered, “do you think I carry a baby’s picture with me everywhere?”

“You did once,” said I, smiling.

“That was before I had seen you. I don’t know where it is. I will look for it, and give it you to-morrow. Come, have you no word of thanks for me, my fairy queen?”

* * * *

“Jenifer,” said I, that night when we

met in my room, "I am engaged to Sir Stephen Tremaine."

Jenifer looked at me wistfully, and burst into tears.

"I've seed it coming this long while," she said; but it looks all the ooglier now it's here."

Some strange feeling stopped me when I would have asked her why she cried, and I scarcely think I was surprised when Martha brought me a note the next morning, in which Jenifer bade me a sorrowful adieu. She was unhappy at Treval, she said, and she would go to her own village. She hoped the doctor was not dead or dying in that foreign prison; but her heart misgave her, now she saw all his friends desert him.

I cried bitterly over this letter, and Jenifer's departure, for I loved her, and I loved Hubert too, and somehow, now I had triumphed and won Sir Stephen, it did not seem so great a victory, so great a happiness.

It had grown out of hate and jealousy, and when I took Alice's picture that day, and would have flung it out into the sea, some feeling of compunction held back my hand, and carrying it home with me from my solitary walk, I put it with Miss Mildred's agate box.

Then I wrote to Mrs. Spencer and Mr. Winterdale, and asked if they had received any news of Hubert.

Uneasy, restless, and unhappy, I wandered from room to room, till at last, looking down from the window, out of which I had gazed as a child on the cedar-tree, I saw Sir Stephen standing on the lawn. The wind played with his brown curls, and his eyes, filled with the light of love, looked up to mine.

"How handsome he is!" I thought.

"Esther," he whispered, "come down to me, my love, my darling. I am sad as night without you."

He opened his arms with a gay smile, and

beckoned to me again and again, but I turned away, and fled to Miss Mildred's sitting-room, and sat down at her knee on a low stool.

"Esther," she said, laying her hand on my head caressingly, "write to your father and mother to-night, and ask them to Treval to your wedding."

I caught her hand, and leaning my cheek against its smooth satin, I answered in a low whisper—

"I will do your bidding, Miss Mildred."

Then I bent my head down lower till I touched her robe, and there resting it, I sobbed and wept.

For her, for Sir Stephen, for hate against Alice, I was giving up all I cared for. Where was honest Jenifer? Where was Hubert? And where was the fierce purpose over which I had brooded so long?

"Miss Mildred," said I, through my tears, "I have had a dream. Nearly every

night since I came to Treval I have seen old Thomas Flavel, the ghost-layer. He comes to my bedside, he beckons me to rise and follow him to a remote chamber. 'Write,' he says, and I obey. And standing over me, he dictates all the history of that blank time in my life—lost here, Miss Mildred—lost at Treval. And while I write I remember it perfectly, but when I have finished three sheets—every night the same number—he takes them from me and hides them. Vainly I strive to see where he places them—he keeps his secret too well. I return to my room exceeding sorrowful; but, Miss Mildred"—here I sank my voice to a whisper—"I find my fingers *stained with ink* when I awake, and I am tired, tired. And day by day, so vivid is my dream, I search through all the rooms for the hidden manuscript, but I never find it. Thomas Flavel is too cunning—he hides it well. But, Miss Mildred, search-

ing thus, I have found this—look, it is a little drawing—a sketch—wondrous like, too, are these touches to my own pencil, yet I swear to you I never drew this, unless I did it in madness, or in sleep—and I showed this likeness—it *is* a likeness—to Martha, and she cried out, ‘Sarah Trengellas! Poor old Sarah! and exactly like her, too!’ And oh, Miss Mildred”—here I clung to her convulsively—“this face is not the face I saw on the roof—oh! don’t let me hurt you, Miss Mildred! Send me away ere it be too late, ere I find out something I must tell to the world. Yes, I will write, and bid them come to the wedding, and let it be at once. My father said he would be in London on Monday; he can be here by Thursday—let it be that day. Speak to Stephen for me—do not let him think me bold and forward. It is for you I do this, Miss Mildred—for you I quit Treval.”

I never looked up once when I was speaking, but I felt her frame tremble from head to foot.

"My poor Esther," she said, "it was but a dream—no dream of yours can ever hurt me. Give me this sketch of some ancient female which your excited imagination deems so wondrous. *I* see no likeness in it to Sarah. Yes, the wedding shall be on Thursday; I will manage all things with Sir Stephen."

"But, Miss Mildred"—and still I did not look at her—"Thomas Flavel tells me the secret of the red room."

There was a moment's silence, and the beating of her heart and of mine sounded together.

"And you remember this secret, Esther?"

The hollow sound of her voice startled me. Oh the desolate ring of patience in it, and the untold pain!

"No, I write it down, and he hides it

like the rest. He, a ghost-layer, should he be a ghost himself?"


"Esther, do you know that *my* room is the red room? It was I that turned it to simple green and white. It was a blood-red once, and was kept that colour in honour of the legend, which says two brothers fought in hatred there in Cromwell's time, and one killed the other."

"Perhaps that's the story I dream," said I, ponderingly. "Are you not afraid to sleep in such a ghostly room?"

"No," said Mildred. "I am not a dreamer like you, Esther."

CHAPTER VI.

IT was the Tuesday night before my wedding-day. I was at Treganowen. I had persuaded Miss Mildred to let me spend a few days here with Prudence White; the quiet of the place relieved the excitement of my overwrought mind, and the persistent dream of the old ghost-layer ceased to haunt me. Moreover, this tranquil spot, like the shadow of a cloister, sheltered me from Sir Stephen's passionate admiration, which pursued me at Treval with an expression too open and assiduous to please wholly a shy, reserved nature like mine. The shower of tender epithets that fell from his full lips often made me tremble, not with love, but with fear—fear lest the



stream which made so great a sound should be shallow—and I shrank like a sensitive plant when the sudden grasp of his warm hand came upon me in the stilly rooms of haunted Treval. At Treganowen I refused to admit him, as I was here alone, and in his absence the fever of my heart, with its strange alternations of love, of terror, of repugnance, abated. Peace drew near again, and laid her cool, fresh hand upon my brow, and thus tranquil, though quivering with all the hope of life and love, my sleep was dreamless and happy.

Suddenly, a confusion and noise in the house awoke me, then my door was flung open, and Prudence White, with lights, came hurrying in, followed by — my mother !

In intense amazement I started up and gazed at her disordered hair, and pale face, and weary looks, all of which spoke of hurried travel. Impatiently she waved

Prudence from the room, and then flung herself passionately down by my bedside.

"Esther!" she cried, "is this true? Do you marry Stephen Tremaine on Thursday?"

"It is true," I answered, as, trembling with affright, I gazed at her anxiously.

"And what do those witches at Treval give him?"

"There is no fear of our being poor," said I. "He will inherit Treval at the sisters' death, and meanwhile they settle on him three thousand a year. All this is already arranged."

"A heavy bribe," sneered my mother. "They pay him a good price to forsake Alice whom he loves, and marry you whom he does not love."

"You are mistaken," I replied, coldly. "Stephen loves me; it is Alice whom he does not love."

I drew from beneath my pillow his last passionate letter, filled to overflowing with

tenderness ; like a full shower of summer rain descending on the thirsty flowers, so poured the free torrent of his words beneath his easy and fiery pen. Then, pointing to some rare flowers on my table, fetched from Exeter, I put the letter in my mother's hand.

"He sent me those and this to day ; read it."

Hastily she cast her eye over the pages, and then exclaimed in a changed voice—

"God help me ! If Alice saw this she would die."

"I am sorry for Miss Weston," said I, sarcastically. "It is certainly unfortunate for her that she should fall in love with a gentleman who, as she must always have known, was destined to marry another. Tell her my husband and I hope she will forget us both, and console herself by giving her heart to some one who will be glad of the gift."

My mother seemed speechless as she listened to me.

"Really," I continued, "it is scarcely kind to talk in this way of Miss Weston's love for Sir Stephen; she might as well care for a married man. You should keep her secret better, mamma."

"Are you mad?" exclaimed my mother.

"No," I answered; "but I am sleepy. Why wake me to-night with the story of this love-sick Miss Weston?—would not to-morrow have been time enough?"

For answer my mother burst into bitter weeping, and clasped me in her arms.

"Oh, Esther, do not retaliate on me so cruelly! Have mercy on Alice! Give up Stephen Tremaine!"

"Give up Stephen?—and for Alice?—no, never!" I cried, forcing myself from my mother's unwonted clasp. "What is Alice to me that I should renounce for her the man I love—the man whose wife I have promised to be in two days? Is he a bauble to be changed from hand to hand? Do

his own heart, his own feelings, count for nothing in this, that without reason I should fling him off for the sake of a stranger?"

"A stranger!" cried my mother, in accents like one beside herself. "Alice is your sister—your twin sister!"

I heard, but I could not understand; I could not care—it was too new, too strange to enter my heart in a moment. I was still hard as a rock.

"Alice my sister?" said I in a tone of cold surprise. "Well, and what then? Can I love an unknown sister all at once? I have been brought up amid secrets—this the cruellest, and if I have any feeling for Alice, it is hatred. I shall not grieve Stephen for her sake—I love *him*. I cannot help your sorrow; you must gather in the bitter fruits of all the secrecy thrown around my childhood."

"It was not of my sowing," said my mother, clenching her hands. "It is Mildred's

doing; for long years she has brooded on revenge; her scheme was to return into your father's family the misery he brought upon hers. For this you have been reared in ignorance of Alice's existence, for this you were early taught to feel that Stephen was your destiny, for this he was permitted to see Alice continually, and win her whole heart, even from childhood, that his love for her might be calm and tranquil like your father's for Mildred; and—oh, I see her whole plot now!—for this you were kept out of his sight while you were unattractive, that your wondrous beauty and talent might strike the surer blow; and, now an unwitting tool in her hands, you are made to win a fickle man's passionate heart from your sister, that your father, gnashing his teeth in useless anguish, may see the misery or death of one daughter consummated by the happiness of the other. Oh! Mildred has a rare idea of justice!"

My mother had spoken with rapid and fevered utterance; she paused now, exhausted, while I, pondering on her words, felt there was certainly truth in them. Yet I still spoke sarcastically.

"Then, if you knew Mildred loved justice so much, why lend yourself to her plans by permitting Stephen and Alice to meet continually?"

"That was a counterplot of mine," said my mother, slightly abashed. "May not a mother scheme for a child destined to be a beggar? You are the eldest—you take all. I thought those marble women, even if offended, would surely give their cousin Treval."

"You reckoned without Stephen's fickleness," said I, bitterly. "You see Miss Mildred knew him best."

"Listen!" cried my mother with renewed energy. "I knew, because your father loved you, Mildred once meant that *you*

should be the forsaken one, and Alice was to have played your part—this would wring your father's soul, she knew."

"And you did not object to this—to his misery and mine—it is only for Alice you feel!" I interrupted, passionately.

"But she relented," continued my mother; "your illness gained you that mercy—and then Alice was made the victim. Well, Mildred has won her revenge. This hatred, this strife between his daughters, to whose loving companionship he has looked forward so long, will kill your father. She is avenged indeed!"

My mother sank down and hid her face on the bed.

"Leave me, and take some rest," said I, firmly. "I will think over this matter. I have need of thought. I will not ask you why you sold me to Miss Mildred, and consented that I should be reared in ignorance of my sister's existence. I believe I can see

all your reasons. Miss Mildred is a woman who has known how to take advantage of every circumstance, every sin and weakness surrounding others. But when I meet my father, I will ask him why he consented to such an iniquity. Go, mother, and do not forget that it is your fault if I hear unmoved that I have a sister. Miss Mildred relented towards us *both*, and would have allowed us to be together at Mrs. Spencer's. Had we been companions for three years, I must have loved her—who can tell? I might have done this thing for her then."

"Oh, Esther! Esther!" sobbed my mother, "you stab me to the heart. I am punished indeed for my hatred to you. I thought then——"

"Never mind," said I. "Where is Alice?"


My voice was faint and low. Something was working at my heart—I knew not what—something that tightened and bound

it, something new and strange for which I had no name.

"She is here—she is with me. She knows nothing yet—she fancies Stephen true to her as ever. Oh, Esther! he has loved her—they have corresponded for four years! Since his return to England she has expected him daily, and she has not had even a line. Ah, you cannot tell how these two months of anxiety have changed her!"

As these words poured over me, my heart gave a heavy bound, a sickening hot throb, and then I fainted.

All was quiet by my bedside when I recovered, and Prudence White alone sat by me. Feigning fatigue, I at length persuaded her to leave me, then I sat up and began to think. Gradually, slowly, there crept about me a strange new feeling, half joy, half pain. I had a sister—a twin sister—this was the secret on which my life was built,




my destiny shaped. Cruelly Miss Mildred had separated me as an infant from this dear tie, that she might work out a slow revenge for her wasted life, her despised love, and her murdered sister. Any way, I and Alice must both suffer, whether she or I took this fickle Sir Stephen for husband. And how much of his love was owing to my wealth? Perhaps all, and if I were poor he would soon go back to Alice—this Alice whom I had hated for so long. And if he remained true to me, what sort of a prize was he to win? What was his or my love worth? In how long or how short a time should I despise him, and feel I had destroyed a sister for a broken toy, or for a remorse hissing like a snake in my conscience?

Fevered by my misery, I rose and dressed, and sat at my window waiting for the dawn. When it came in grey, cold mist, I crept softly down the staircase, but on my way I

passed a door half closed ; it was next my mother's, and I paused a moment, trembling ; the next I had passed within, and with noiseless step approached the bed, and gazed upon the sleeper. A fair young face, that pressed the pillow with gentle touch and quiet breathings—yet not so fair a skin as mine, I thought, and the ebon hair had not the wondrous golden wave that mine held within its blackness. The long dark lashes rested on cheeks still flushed with recent tears, and the lips, half parted, wore a fevered red.

A strange new pity came into my heart as I noted these signs of sorrow and marked the likeness, and yet unlikeness, to myself shining through sleep and sadness on the youthful, rounded face. What a *wonder* she grew to me as I stood thus steadfastly looking upon her ! and what a sudden thrill rushed through my veins as I realised the fact that I was looking upon my other self



—the twin life that had haunted me so long! Then for the first time my heart beat with a wonderful tenderness, new-born, unknown, and the word “sister” rose faintly to my lips. Affrighted at the sound, I drew back and held my breath, yet at the same instant I remembered her action—so dreamily seen by me—on the road to Clifton, when she had striven to touch me sleeping, and I put forth my hand and let my finger rest a single moment on her warm, soft cheek, then I fled swiftly away, tears filling my eyes, and sudden, passionate sobs rising in my throat.

O the magic of an electric touch!

It had seemed nothing to me at first that I had a sister, a twin sister; if the wonder moved me, no love came with it, no warm affection; but now that I had seen her, had leant over her, had touched her, a flood of changed feeling rushed over me. I remembered the haunting memories of my

childhood, the dim consciousness of a loneliness not originally mine, the strange fancy of duality, and the suffering of separation. Then I recalled the time when Alice fell into the sea from the ship, bearing me away—I knew now it was Alice—and a curious shudder crept over me at her danger.

“If she had died!” I said hurriedly, and, thus thinking, I wept, and ran on through Treganowen woods till I reached the sea. The sky was lowering, the clouds hung low, shutting out the early sun, the grass was tangled with rain, the November leaves dripped moisture on me, and the birds flew away supinely as I passed. But like a shadow I went on, across the slippery rocks, down upon the rough shingle, and then over a low flat waste of sand heavy to the feet, and thus to the brink of a pool black with the shadows of the granite cliff—a low, desolate pool of fresh water, having no out-

let to the sea, barred within itself by the strong sand, a prisoner for ever—so near the boundless ocean, and never reaching it—ever hearing the dash of the joyous waves, and never touching them, never joining in the music and the flow—always in these bonds, shut in for ever—always and for ever bearing in its bosom the black shadow of its prison wall, and the loneliness and stillness of its own cold waters. Yet the full tide is so near! See, to its very brink comes the lap, lap of the clear, warm waves; but they never touch it, never pass the barrier, never bring freedom and the salt of glad life to the desolate prisoner.

O pool! barred in for ever, so near all freedom and joy, and never reaching it, I am come to thee! Perhaps Alice will die of grief, so I am come. In the still night, while waiting for the dawn, I thought of thy cold waters. I longed to come hither, and throw myself down by these sandy

bars, and drop heavy tears down, down for ever, and die, if I could.

O God! must I give up all hope? Must I do this thing, and never tell Alice that I have done it? I was so close, close to the sea; another day, another night, and I should have stood by my husband's side, and a boundless life of love would have flowed around me.

Thus sobbed one voice within me, but the other, cold, clear, sensible, whispered sharply—

Esther, you make no sacrifice. If you left him, he would go back with a careless laugh to Alice to-morrow. Do you see those little shining pebbles at your feet? Well, he is not worth one of them. He loves ease, luxury, wealth; to keep these he feared he would have to wed with a weird ugliness that he hated, but he found beauty and a rare, strange fascination. He was delighted that it was not so hard as he deemed to

keep his wealth, with all the refinement it brings, and he mistakes his delight for love. If you took him, and Alice grieved, and he grew weary, it would be better to be even this dull pool than such a wife as you would make. In your hands such a heart as his would grow wicked; in hers he might be careless, but he would never be hard. She is simple, gleeful, childish; she is no diver into motives, like you; she cares not to search any one's soul. Now think, if you and she were poor to-morrow, or dowered alike, whom would he choose?

“ Oh, Alice, Alice ! He would take Alice ! ” I cried bitterly.

And the vexed spirit had its turn now, and tormented me sorely.

I did not blame Sir Stephen. I had striven hard to win him, and it was no marvel I had succeeded. I did not blame him that he was glad in my beauty, and thought his gladness was love—it was a love

that gave him so much. I did not blame him that he would fain keep his position, and all it brought him. It is so hard to struggle with sordid cares, with pinching want and meanness. No wonder he dreaded going back to these, and accepted so willingly the easy fate Miss Mildred offered. No, it was myself I blamed—it was for me to act, not him. But when I thought on what this act should be, I wept again, and cried out against Mildred.

“Cruel, revengeful woman!” I said between my set teeth, “you have avenged yourself, not upon my father, but upon me! Take care! I may yet turn—yes, I may yet turn—and sting you. I will return to Treval, and if that dream of Thomas Flavel haunts me again, I will yet force the old ghost-layer to tell me the secret of the red room.”

Slowly the sun struggled with the rolling mists, heavily the sluggish tide came in with

a moaning from the east, which like a shudder passed cold over the shivering pool; the creeping waves touched my feet, reached the brink of the barred waters, then drew back, leaving salt tears behind, and the grey light came down upon me like a prison wall, hedging me around with a cruel damp touch that pierced my flesh, while the battle raged in my veins, and my soul found no peace.

But I conquered—O thank God!—I conquered at last. And with double thanks let me record here my full praises to Him who helps the stricken, that I conquered before the shadow of Paul Polwhele crossed the dull water, and long before I read the scroll which he placed silently in my hand.

“Your face is grey with sorrow, Esther,” he said. “Go home, child; the day is damp, the sand is wet; why are you lying here? Read my story when you are happier; it will not make you merry.”

"Paul," said I, gently, "if, when I have read this, you feel *sure* I shall pity you, kiss me now, and say farewell. I do not think we shall meet again. I shall go to India with my father."

Paul stood a moment pondering at my words.


"Ah," he said, "I see what you mean to do, and you are right, Esther. I have had a talk with Lucy. You know now that Alice is your sister, and you must be sisters in spite of all. A ruffian like me has no chance to give a blessing—it would turn to a curse, perhaps. Esther, I can't kiss you—I have been a bad man all my life long. The money you had given me is the only sum I had ever touched that has done me good. It has paid my passage to a far country."

He turned to leave me, but I sprang up and stood before him. Then, stooping, he took my hand, and, murmuring something


about its being a little hand—a little soft hand, not made for a rough touch like his—he strode away rapidly. I looked after him a moment, and then went slowly, slowly back to Treganowen.

CHAPTER VII.

"AND did you take care of my plants?" said Alice, holding me tightly by the hand. "Oh! I am sure you did, for I left them all for you; I loved them so much, and I loved you so much, I thought they would speak to you of me. I stooped and kissed them before I went away, and said, 'To-morrow, my sister, my twin-sister, will water you with her own hands, little flowers; how happy you will be!' I can fancy how you tended them, Esther, and wondered why the unknown Alice had left them for you. And the 'Faerie Queene' too! Did you get it? I made Stephen buy it because he said it was your favourite book, and then I put it on my table for you. Wasn't that clever of



me, Esther? And did you care for the little bird I sent you? the pretty piping bullfinch, that sang 'Auld Lang Syne' and 'Sweet Home?' I bought the prettiest cage for him that I could find in Bath, and I had my initials S. T.—I knew my second name, Salome, would not betray me—worked over the door. Oh! how I enjoyed sending all those little presents, and wondering to myself what you would think of them. I sent you a hundred kisses by the little bird, and I told him, when he sang, to twitter of all the love I felt, and tell you with his music that I prayed for you always, and thought of you every hour till my heart was full—full as a stream that runs over its banks. You see *I* always knew I had a sister, and I used to long to be with you, and sometimes I dreamed we were together, and I would put out my arms in the night to touch you, and cry when I awoke. When you were sick,



Esther, I nursed you, and you would take your medicine from no hand but mine. How proud I was of that! I never forgot the hours. And ah! how I used to rain down tears upon your poor little white face, and tremble lest you should die! At last the fever and delirium were over, and you got better, and then seemingly you forgot all your past life, and I was glad of it, for that life at dreary Treval had lost me my pretty little rosy Esther whom I remembered in India. But you were come back to me now, and we talked, we laughed, we sang together, and were happy all the day long. You were so clever, Esther, you beat me in everything, and I should never have believed you were still ill, as the doctor said, except for one terrible fancy you had, and to erase this Miss Admonitia came and took you away. Oh, Esther, I was so sorry when you left! And you—were you sorry?"

"I cannot remember it, Alice," said I, softly.

"And so you never recollected me, Esther!—never loved me, never thought of me! Ah! you should have thought of me sometimes, the poor exile from home, shut out of your heart by Miss Mildred's cruel request, and even my very name denied me. Say, Esther, do you love me? You don't hate me, do you? I know you can't love me as dearly as I love you, because you forgot me when you recovered, and you were kept ignorant of my existence, and I heard of you always, and was free to love you. But say, Esther, you don't dislike me, do you?"

"Oh, Alice!" said I, trembling as she clung to me, "why do you ask me such bitter questions?"

"Say you love me, then," said Alice, pinching my cheek.

"I love you," I answered, "and I will

not take away your books, or your flowers, or anything that is yours."

Alice clapped her hands gleefully.

"Oh! that is exactly like my little Esther, the tiny, wee, baby sister I remember in India; you always gave me all your picture-books, your playthings, and your flowers."

"Did I!" said I abstractedly.

"Yes. But afterwards, you know, you took everything from me. I don't mind the fortune, Esther—you are the eldest, and if grandpapa left his grim old Towers to the eldest you can't help it—but I *do* mind my name. I hated to be called Weston when I knew I was a Treganowen, but of course I obeyed papa. How lovely you are, Esther! But you look sad, dear. Why, it is I who should look sad! Only think how sorrowful I might have been all my life, if mine were not so happy a heart, that I can't help being glad! You have had all the

good fortune, my pretty sister, and I nothing. I declare, now, you have even got all the beauty—hasn't she, mamma?"

Alice laughed at the idea, but never seemed to expect an answer. I pondered on her words, which were both true and untrue. I had the name, the fortune, but she had all the love—yes, even my father's—I saw it now. The thought was too heavy, worn out with sorrow and sleeplessness as I was, and I startled Alice by flinging myself suddenly on my knees, and clasping her tightly; then I rested my head on her lap, and burst into tears.

How lovingly she soothed and caressed me, and how new and strange it was to have that little soft hand resting on my head, and to feel those pure kisses showered upon my hot brow!

"There, now you are smiling again," said Alice, "and as a reward I'll tell you a secret—a great secret."

And then talking as though speech were some new-found blessing, she opened her heart to me, spread out all her little hopes and fears, told me of Stephen's letters from the wars, and how these had stopped suddenly, and she half thought he was ill, or half feared he was fickle. And under this fear she had grown thin and pale of late; once she had fresh roses in her cheeks, and people had called her pretty, but she was worn and faded now, quite a poor thing to look at she knew, and she wished she might grow beautiful again, but only for his sake, I might be sure of that.

Thus she prattled on, stabbing me to the heart innocently, while I answered back with cheerful words, untinged by the jealous pain of the wound she gave.

And now the carriage arrived to take me back to Treval, and at sight of it my mother, having succeeded in all she wished, grew frightened, and, drawing me aside, she

began to debate on the consequences of Miss Mildred's anger.

"Leave it to me, and I will answer for all," I said, sadly. "Only keep Alice from the servants, that no gossip may fall upon her ear of my coming marriage."

"You look ill, Esther," said my mother, with unwonted kindness. "Take Dominica with you. I can spare her, and she has come to me twice this morning to beg that she might go with you."

"As you will," I answered, carelessly. "It does not matter whom I take with me, for Jenifer has forsaken me; nothing matters much in this world, I think."

I kissed Alice and my mother, and departed for Treval. How changed the road seemed since I drove over it three days ago! And yet here is the flowering furze like a golden wall on either side, and there lie the glorious hills of granite, and the surging sweep of the blue sea, all beautiful as ever.

I turned my eyes abruptly from the fair scene, and fixed them on Dominica's face, and as I gazed a sudden recollection grew upon me.

"Dominica," I said, "I sat to-day by the side of that lonely pool on the sands which the peasants call Wisht-man's-weir; and as I lay there thinking, two shadows of people on the cliffs above troubled the water. What has Mr. Winterdale asked you to do, Dominica?"

I fancied she changed countenance, but she answered readily enough—

"He begged me to tell you that Jenifer has gone away, no one knows whither, and he ordered me to give you his nephew's address, miss. Here it is."

With intense joy I snatched the paper from her hand, and forgetting all about Mr. Winterdale, I sank into a reverie, from which I was only aroused by our arrival at Treval.

"Your father will be here to-morrow," said Miss Mildred, clasping my hand with an unwonted light in her dark eyes. "He could not come to-day, so I fear the wedding cannot be till Saturday, Esther, for Friday, you know, is an unlucky day."

"Then let it be Saturday," I answered.

My soul was bitter within me at this pale, cold woman's slow revenge, so, unable to bear her presence, I turned hastily away, lest some sharp speech should betray the purpose that once more rankled hotly in my heart. She let my hand go lingeringly, and her flushed face paled, and her eyes were shadowed with sorrow, as she watched me leave the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Am I bound now to show her mercy?" I asked myself. "Surely, for my sister's sake, I ought to pursue this secret. I have no right to fling Stephen into beggary, I must at least gain power to make him and Alice happy. Let me wring that much from this cruel woman, and I will be content.

Then I leant my head upon my hands, and tried to form some plan of search, through which I might be sure to leave no room or garret unvisited in old Treval. The sketch I had shown to Martha, which she declared to be the likeness of Sarah Tregellas, I had found in one of the forsaken bed-rooms of the great corridor, hence

I determined to explore this part of the house first. But when I put my hand upon the lock of my door, and would have gone forth, I heard Miss Mildred's voice, and with a beating heart, I started back and sat down again like a coward.

"I will think of some new plan," I faltered. "But first, what is Miss Mildred saying? Let me listen."

"Dominica, take this wine to Miss Esther; she is looking pale. Do not say I sent it, but induce her to drink it, if you can. The poor child is ill, I am certain. No, I cannot go to her, Dominica. I—I think she would not like to be disturbed by me."

Oh! why that old desolate ring of patience in her voice? why that sad certainty in her tone of knowing herself disliked? Because she lost my father's love, has she lost the love of the whole world? How gentle she is! how strangely self-denying, kind, and lovely! I cannot do anything to hurt her.

No, no ! I cannot. Spare me this task, relentless fate !

“Put the tray down there, Dominica. Yes, yes, I will drink the wine, if it will please Miss Mildred. I heard what she said : go and tell her I am well.”

Alone once more ; and again my brow rests upon my hand in thought.

This morning she seemed to me a monster—why does she send me wine ? I will not touch it. She is cruel as the grave. This long, slow scheme of vengeance, this concealment of Alice's existence from me all my life—it is dreadful, horrible !

Yes, I *will* find out the secret of that woful face upon the roof, nothing shall hold me back.

Again my fingers turned the lock, and, trembling at my purpose, I stood a moment in the long passage outside my room. Then, with slow, unwilling steps, I forced myself to traverse it, and reached the great corri-

dor, crossing the western front, and there again I paused, ere I entered the room where I had found the likeness of Sarah Tregallas.


Upon a small inlaid table near the window, I was startled to see my portfolio, which, before Jenifer left me, I had missed and searched for in vain. "I must have brought it here and forgotten it," I thought.

Then throwing myself into a chair close by, I turned over the leaves listlessly, still pursuing my old train of thought by one thread, while another wound on thus:—"Ah, here is the grotesque caricature of my poor Aunt Priscilla, drawn by a ghost for the benefit of the Miss Colters and the Miss Bolters." I placed it within the book and turned page after page, scarcely giving a look to the weird designs in which my pencil delighted. But suddenly a feeling of tightness seized my heart, my cheeks grew hot, my eyes swam in tears: I held in my hand a portrait of Hubert Spencer,

not hastily drawn like the sketch of Sarah, but limned carefully, lovingly, with the features so well defined, with the kindly thought, the wondrous charm and beauty of his sympathetic face, so skilfully portrayed, that he seemed to smile upon me; and I, putting the drawing down, burst into tears.

“Oh! Jenifer!” I cried, sobbing, for I was sure it was she, “why have you hidden this here?”

Then I fell to wondering how she had got it for me. Often I had tried to draw a likeness of Hubert from memory, but I had always failed. And Jenifer, looking over my shoulder, would call my failures by every ugly name in her vocabulary, and ask if such a face as Hubert's could be made out of “inky water, or coloured pisons?” Doubtless she had procured this from Mrs. Spencer, but it brought me no joy; Paul's shadow was over it, and I thrust it out of sight with tears, and a painful shudder.



As I did this, another drawing displaced, fluttered to the ground. I stooped to pick it up, then as my eye glanced over it, I stood upright in breathless fear and amazement. The picture portrayed the bent, fragile figure of a woman, seated in a long, low room, dimly lighted—a room I had never seen—and her face was that of the phantom on the roof, the patient, weary, woful face I had watched from the cedar-tree. The drawing was done by a masterly hand, and in the corner in quaint figures was written—

“THOMAS FLAVEL, GHOST-LAYER.”

Sick with fear I laid it down, and sought painfully in my brain for the meaning of this mystery. I could find none, but I resolved to show the picture to no one, and fearing Martha or Miss Mildred might see it, I carried the portfolio to my room, and locked it away.

Then I searched resolutely through the

house, from chamber to chamber, though my footsteps sounded to my ears like a traitor's, and a whispering voice continually reminded me of all Miss Mildred's kindness.

"And remember," it said, "she relented; she would have permitted you and Alice to be dear companions."

"That was Hubert's doing," I answered. "Oh, why was he always so watchful, so tender?"

"It was not Mildred's fault," continued the voice, "that Alice wept in bitter disappointment, grieving for you, as she rode from Clifton, neither was it her doing that you hated your sister, and plotted in your heart to take away her lover."

I ceased my search abruptly. I could discover nothing that day, nor on the next, when from the lawn I counted all the windows, allotting to each its chamber, from the great library, with its gothic arch, to the topmost garret, with its little casement, out

of which I had leaned, on that memorable day upon the roof.

But I will say no more of my feverish search, pursued sometimes in remorse, sometimes in anger. Let it suffice that two or three days thus passed by, and meanwhile my father did not arrive. This delay was to me like a reprieve to the condemned. Still on every pretence possible I avoided Stephen Tremaine, and escaped from his assiduities by a thousand excuses. An unnatural bustle pervaded Treval, and yet in the turmoil a stillness, like the silence of a coming tempest. Worn out by emotion I wandered feverishly from room to room, sometimes on staircase or in corridor overtaken or met by my betrothed, who seized me with a warm, loving hand, and poured forth questions on my strange mood, intermingled with caresses, which I bore passively, ere escaping from his grasp, I wandered away again, like one demented by

sorrow. At length my father came, and repressing the yearning which burnt within me to fling myself into his arms and weep away my grief, I only greeted him with a calm affection, and then sought a quiet place wherein to weep, and shutting myself in my chamber I wept there.

Ah! I was very young, witch and wise woman though they called me, and soon the tears and sobs subsided into slumber sweet and simple as a vexed child's. A tap at my door aroused me. It was Dominica with one of those tiny cups of tea then fashionable. This woman's attention to me had been so great that my suspicion and dislike of her had half faded away.

"Drink this, and let me dress you, Miss Esther," she said. "In another hour every one will be assembled in the great drawing-room, and your father and Miss Mildred will meet for the first time these many, many years."

I started up from the bed where I had flung myself, and gazed at her with eyes scarce unlocked from sleep. It seemed to me that she had brought the old ghost-layer with her, and I was to rise and follow whithersoever they led. Every night since my return to Treval he had haunted me as before, and filled as my thoughts were awaking, it was still he who held them in sleep. And still he dictated the history of that blank time, and hid it with relentless mystery.

“Dominica,” said I, dreaming, “there is a secret close at my right hand, yet I cannot touch it—a secret that would give me power and revenge over a cruel woman, yet I cannot lay a finger on it, for it comes to me and goes like a shadow.”

Then waking up I thrust these words aside, and prayed her hurriedly to fetch Sir Stephen.

“Bid him meet me in the west drawing-

room, that looks out upon the bee's-nest," I said.

In five minutes I was standing in the bay window where I had first heard words of love from Stephen's lips. I had held the place dear for his sake, but now I shuddered as I thought of the bitter recollections that would henceforth be planted here.

There was a hurried step, a firm hand upon the lock, and then without daring to look up I welcomed my lover by my crimsoned cheeks.

"Esther," he said, standing by my side for the first time timidly, and without the eager clasp with which he too often emphasized his words—"Esther, what is this? You are changed—these three days past no kind word or look has greeted me. Is this as it should be, Esther, standing as we two are on the verge of that solemn day which shall bind us both together till death?"

It seemed as though, when I was about

to quit him for ever, he should make me love him more by gentler, wiser words than of old.

I could not look up, for my eyes were full of love—a love that I did not altogether despise and hate, as I mostly hated my love for this glittering idol of my imagination.

“Stephen,” I faltered, “you are right; things are not as they should be between us two.”

My trembling voice broke here, for I could feel his pain, his suspense, stabbing me; but a moment more and a burning flush covered my face, as the fierce determination again arose that Mildred's revenge should fail, and the cruel dart glance harmless aside from my father's peace and Alice's breaking heart.

“No, things are not as they should be,” I continued firmly, “for you have deceived me, and I have deceived you. I have acted in coquetry and vanity; you half in vanity

and half from the necessity of your position. Esther Treganowen or poverty—these were the alternatives, and you were pleased when you found Esther was not a witch.”

“Esther, are you mad?” cried Stephen, seizing my hand. “Of what are you accusing me?—of what are you accusing yourself?”

“Of the bitter truth,” I said, as I gently drew away my hand. “You do not really love me nor I you; pardon me, and let us part.”

Stephen gazed at me in amazement and anger. “This is some childish whim,” he cried—“this is because you will keep faith with your silly word, when you swore in childish anger you would refuse me.”

I looked up and met his angry eyes. Heaven help me!—there was no refusal, no scorn in mine, nothing but anguish. I confess it, though I laugh now at the short, foolish passion that beguiled me. That

look routed me. Stephen had me in his arms in a moment.

"You do not love me!" he cried, as he kissed cheek and brow. "By this, and that, you love me too well to play the baby with me thus. Who shall part us now, Esther?"

The straining clasp in which he held me was like a chain. I had no happiness in it, only a sense of pain, and a longing to be free from his thrall, a loathing, too, of his power which drooped my head upon his shoulder, and fastened my hand in his. Then he raised his face triumphant, laughter and love falling in a shower from his eyes to mine.

"Who talks of parting?" he said. "What silly little captive is this, who with words of farewell on her lips comes creeping to my arms for a loving word and a kiss? Why, Esther, a silken string would hold you; with my shadow I could bind you a prisoner to my side; but to-morrow"

—and his eyes gleamed—“I shall put a heavy fetter on this little hand in the shape of a golden ring, and then my tamed eagle will be my fluttering dove—my——”

“Not you slave, Sir Stephen!” I cried hastily, while every throb of life within me rebelled against his words. Now indeed, as I stood flushed and indignant before him, I felt I could never take him as a husband—a master; now, indeed, I knew I did not love him.

“Who talks of slaves?” he said.

“I do, I answered, mournfully. “When I marry I will be a slave from head to foot, from crown to heel, body, soul, and spirit a slave, and I can never be that to you, Sir Stephen. I repeat, I do not love. I am two Esthers, not one. One loves you, one yields to your kiss, and bears humbly your pride and triumph; the other hates you, and loathes herself because hand and lip have touched yours. Now marry me if you dare!”

With flashing eyes and burning cheeks I stood before him, and awaited his answer; and then with cold contempt I saw the fear that came over his face, and read the thought within him that I was touched with madness—a dangerous wife for a man to have—a panther, soft, beautiful, gracious, but deadly. He shrank away from me, and leant against the mantelpiece, shading his brow with his hand.

“Esther, you choose a strange time for your mad speeches. Do you know our marriage settlement will be signed to-night?”

“Yes, and the deeds which give you Treval, and put you in possession of the price paid you for taking a wife you do not love.”

“Esther!” exclaimed Stephen, “now you insult me, and I cannot forgive that. If you are in earnest, we had indeed better part, late as it is to do it.”

“My husband,” said I, “shall never be

suspected of anything for which I *could* insult him."

"Esther, I will not bear this even from you. How dare you accuse me of such despicable meanness?"

"Thank God," said I, to my soul, "there is manhood and truth in him. Alice will be happy. *I* never should. I should never believe there was good in him. I should always be searching for it, as I am now; and how dreadful for a wife to say of her husband, 'Thank God, there is good in him!'"

Rapid as lightning was my thought, and then I spoke: "I accuse you because I believe money, not love, has made you my suitor. This belief rankles in my heart, it fills me with suspicion and jealousy. I could not be happy as your wife, so we *must* part."

Stephen turned his face from me, but he made no reply. The leaven was already working, and the thought creeping about

his soul that I was proud, cruel, false—an unloving, ungenerous woman, with whom life would be a tempest.

“And it is true,” I continued, sadly, “that I do not love you with my whole entire nature ; something within me revolts against your power ; the man I marry I must love and worship with *both* my beings, not with only one, as I do you.”

“You are blessed,” he answered sarcastically ; “most people are content with having one soul.”

“It is not my fault if you cannot understand me,” I responded. “If I had said my heart and my judgment do not agree, you would comprehend, I suppose.”

“It would be simpler language, Miss Treganowen,” he replied, “and there would be a grain of sense in it, which my stupidity failed to see in your other speech. You make this flattering discovery very late,” he added, bitterly.

"Yes it is late, but not too late. You will forgive me one day, Sir Stephen, but when a wife makes such a discovery, a husband never forgives. If I married you to-morrow I should make you miserable."

He looked at me as if he thought our opinions tallied, but he simply said—

"In this mood, certainly."

Pride bore him up a moment longer, then he broke down with a cry like a sob.

"Oh, Esther! I thought you loved me."

"May God forgive us all!—Mildred is a cruel woman," said I to myself, as with shrinking eyes I looked upon his grief.

"Stephen," I said, gently, "try to forgive me. I am very wretched, more wretched than you will ever know. The time will come when you will be glad of this, but perhaps the time will never come when I shall be glad. Things lie in my path that can never block up yours, and if you suffer

a little, love, health, wealth, will console you."

He scarcely seemed to hear me: he was trying to understand that he was not my lover—not my husband.

"Wealth!" he exclaimed, as he raised his head. "I am a beggar."

"So am I," said I, proudly. "Stephen, I am no heiress. It is my intention to-night to refuse Miss Mildred's benefits."

"And why?" asked Stephen, coldly.

"Simply because I am her enemy; and I have resolved on bringing her to justice for long years of cruelty to me and mine."

"What has she done to you, Esther, save lavish love and riches on you?"

"She has brought me up amid secrets; she has hidden from me all my life long that I have a sister—a twin sister."

Sir Stephen in amazement looked at me, as though he thought I had lost my reason.

"You know her," I continued. "She is Alice Weston."

"Alice ! Alice Weston your sister ?"

A deep flush covered his face, and his eyes fell before mine.

"Yes, and she is close by at Treganowen, with my mother. Go and see her ; she will be glad ; she tells me she has known you long."

"How refreshing it will be to him to go to her in all her frank, cheerful simplicity of heart and soul after leaving *me* !" I said to myself, bitterly.

Some remorse, some sad thought was working on Stephen's face.

"Poor little Alice," he said, pondering deeply. "And was she to have come to our wedding to-morrow ?"

I shook my head. "She has heard of no weddings. Oblige me in one thing, Stephen. I am proud ; do not tell my sister that you and I were once betrothed ; never tell her

of this project of marriage between us. Promise me. I have already my mother's word."

Was it a sigh of relief or of pain that burst from Stephen's lips, as he said, eagerly—

"I promise you, Esther, on my honour. And do you indeed desert me? Have you resolved to make me and yourself penniless?"

"For myself I am resolved," I answered; "but there is no reason why you should lose anything. Miss Mildred is not unjust; she will see this is my doing, not yours, and she will act accordingly, and perhaps she will bestow on my sister the wealth I intend to refuse."

Sir Stephen rested silent, as if pondering my words.

"And what am I to do?" he said at length, in a changed tone. "I cannot be present now at this family meeting."

"Miss Mildred never meant you should be," I answered. "After the signing of the settlement she would ask you to quit us."

Sir Stephen sighed deeply. Well, the settlement certainly was magnificent — it was worth a sigh.

"And what am I to do?" he reiterated, wearily.


"Go to Treganowen," I answered: "I will account to her for your absence. Believe, too, that I will care for your interests; none will do it as I shall, Stephen. Now take this monthly rose to Alice for me."

"Mechanically Sir Stephen took it from my fingers, and gazed at me wistfully.

"Is there no hope, Esther? Are we parted for ever and ever?"

"For ever," I echoed. "And I only ask that you will not tell my sister of our foolish love."

Did I not know, when I said these words, that if he told the whole world he would



not tell her? But I was not one to do a thing by halves. If I had shown jealousy, if I had uttered a reproach, if I had let him see that I ever knew of his love for Alice, I could not plant the barb in his self-love which would destroy any pleasant thought of me, and bring him back to *her*. So I ruthlessly cut and wounded his heart till I felt he hated me, and I uttered not a word which could show him I knew the secret of his fickleness. All the blame of this abrupt change, this hard cruelty, I took on myself. "And on myself alone," I said aloud, "Miss Mildred's anger shall fall."

He looked at me in wonder.

"Who can understand you?" he said. "You have been brought up strangely. Why has your sister's existence been kept secret from you?"

How I could have answered him ! But I only said quietly, "I cannot tell you. It is a family history belonging more to my father and Miss Mildred than to me."

"Alice was always interested in you," he remarked thoughtfully.

"She is a lovely girl," said I, "good and gentle, and her heart is fresh and pure as the first dew. When she loves——" I stopped, but it seemed to Sir Stephen I had said more, for he cried out eagerly—

"Yes, Esther, when she loves it will be with her whole heart, not with half her spirit, as you say you do. I firmly believe *you* have never loved me."

He did not see my scalding tears, for I turned away from him with my hand upon the door.

"You speak like an oracle, Stephen. I never loved you; it was all vanity, romance, the veriest rubbish of a wild imagination."

"Take care!" he cried fiercely: "do not exasperate me too much. A man cannot always be played with and insulted in this way. Love is a raging fire; men have shot women for less than you have said to me."

His words did not frighten, they softened me. I turned towards him with a more generous sorrow in my heart than I had felt yet.

"Say you forgive me," I said. "We can never meet again like this."

He did not heed me.

"Esther, recollect in rejecting me you beggar me also. Take the sole responsibility of this deed upon yourself. Disappoint your father, anger Miss Mildred, beggar me if you will, but remember I am not the guilty one, though it is I who must bear the consequence of your sudden, selfish, and cruel change. You are safe—the Misses Tremaine love you—you will not suffer. As for me, they only took me from obscurity for your sake. Farewell, Miss Treganowen; you are unworthy of the love I so blindly gave you. I shall not grieve for you. It is better to work for one's bread than to have such a wife as you. I fling you *all* off, and would to God I had

been brave enough to be independent before !”

Without a touch of the hand, without a look or a sign, he opened the window and sprang out upon the green sward, and dashing aside the seringas strode away with hasty step.

I sank down upon the carpet and burst into an hysterical laugh.

“Such a love as this is not worth weeping for,” I said to myself bitterly. “I wonder how much of what we have felt and said is *real*, and how much was like the actor’s passion, which only runs through his veins while the scene fires him !”

Ah ! since my imagination painted a halo round this idol—since I lent myself a tool to Miss Mildred’s schemes of vengeance, in what a maze I have wandered ! I know not now whether I am glad or sorry, whether I love or hate, whether Stephen is good or bad. I only know that towards myself I feel an intense contempt from head to heel.

And all the world is false, hollow, a sham, *stagey* like myself! Paugh! I am sick!

O Jenifer! my poor Jenifer! I wish you were here. I could talk to you about Hubert; that would do me good.

At this moment I heard the sound of a horse's hoofs on the western road, the road to Treganowen, and I no longer doubted whether I felt glad or sorry. Like one relieved from the heaviness of a great weight, I sprang up-stairs to my own room and dressed quickly, wondering the while why a parting I had deemed so difficult and cruel should prove so easy.

Then dismissing Dominica, and counting forty minutes on the clock to the hour when I should be summoned to the great drawing-room, I drew forth Paul's narrative and read it. I had vowed to myself, that till I and my silly love were parted, I would not probe the secret of my cousinship to Hubert Spencer.

CHAPTER IX.

I WILL not speak here of this secret, or show in words a single wave of that sea of emotion which agitated me, as I put the narrative aside, and prepared to descend to the drawing-room.

According to Miss Mildred's wish I was dressed in white, no single touch of colour except the small green leaves of the pearly Cornish heath, which trimmed my Dacca muslin appearing on my dress. The flutter of my slight robe, light and soft as cobweb, made me pause in sudden fear, as I descended the staircase, and I looked back in terror, wondering if the interruption I anticipated to the imposing ceremony Miss Mildred had prepared, were already come, too early for my wish.

But no, all was silent, and never did Treval appear to me so hushed, so ghostly, so haunted, as with soft step and closed lips, and every nerve trembling with secret expectation, I crept on through hall and corridor, till I reached the door of the great drawing-room, where the murmur of voices told me Miss Admonitia and others were already assembled. Then entering, I walked softly across the carpet, and took my place silently by my father's side.

"Can this be Miss Mildred?" I asked myself, as with the flush of excitement on my cheeks I rose as she entered.

Her dress was of white satin; a long sweeping robe, edged with an arabesque worked in jet and small diamonds. Her hair was dressed in the old style, drawn high from the forehead, with long undulating waves trailing on her neck, and a few diamonds glanced here and there like gleaming fire amid their rich black tresses. Her face wore an unwonted flush, and her eyes

shone brightly. She was certainly beautiful, and no one would have dreamed of giving her the full complement of years that had passed so painfully over her pale brow. The white dress took somewhat from the fragility of her figure, and in giving roundness added youth, so now for the first time I had a true idea of that loveliness which in girlhood had gained her the title of the white rose.

My father advanced hurriedly to meet her as she entered. He was much agitated, and seemed scarcely conscious of his action, as he took her hand and placed her in a chair.

"Mildred," he said in a low tone, but no further word broke from his quivering lips. To see this pale woman was to see the ghost of his dead youth, and to raise from their shrouds a thousand memories whose reproachful presence stifled speech.

Mildred's lip, too, shook an instant, but then in the softest accents of her silvery

voice her tones broke distinctly, gently on the ear.

"I am sorry, Ralph, we could not ask your wife here to-night. Lucy will come to-morrow to Esther's wedding."

In my hot, angry heart I had resolved to let all things go on as she willed till the time arrived for me to speak, so I returned no contradiction to her words.

My father bowed his head in reply, his eyes fixed mournfully on the face he had once loved so well.

Then Mildred turned towards me, laying her thin white hand on the parchment before him.

"Esther, where is Stephen? Why does he delay?"

"He is gone to Treganowen on a message for me," said I in a low voice. "I was sure you would not want him, Miss Mildred."

Mildred smiled kindly, and my cruel heart smote me like a stab.

"Well, your settlement must be signed

in the morning," she said. "You have certainly spared me some embarrassment, Esther, for I only wanted Stephen during the reading of this deed of gift, by which Admonitia bestows on him the estate and mansion of Pencarrow, which brings in a rental of three thousand a-year."

"Is there any condition with your gift?" I asked.

"Admonitia and I do not make conditions with our gifts, Esther."

With a sigh of relief I came forward to the table.

"You give it without reference to me—it would be his if I were dead—if I were to die to-morrow."

"Certainly," said Admonitia, gravely. "We owe him this in justice, having brought him up as our heir; but it is nevertheless true that your marriage——"

"Oh! do not say so!" I cried, eagerly.

But Miss Mildred stayed my further

speech by laying her silken hand upon my head.

"What matters it our motive, Esther? Freely we give it, freely Sir Stephen accepts the gift. Mr. Tresidder, let us sign at once."

An old gentleman seated by the window, whom I had long known as the confidential solicitor of the sisters, came forward and pointed to the spot where Miss Admonitia was to place her signature.

"And may I be the witness?" said I, eagerly.

"He cannot say now I have beggared him," I thought with joy, as with rapid pen I wrote my name.

Then the parchment was set aside on a distant table, and Miss Mildred, beckoning with her hand for silence, said softly—

"Mr. Tresidder, will you oblige me by reading Admiral Treganowen's will?"

As the old gentleman untied the tape

round a small packet, I glanced on the assembled faces. My father was pale, even to deathliness; Miss Admonitia simply watchful of her sister; Miss Mildred I can only compare to a trembling flame: there was the quivering as of a suppressed fire in her; her very hair seemed rustling, her eyes gleamed, and the firm yet agitated clasp of her hand on a small casket, told of a strength and burning like the bursting forth of a volcano. In the quiet holding in of our breath, in the stillness of our excitement, the rustling of the paper in Mr. Tresidder's hands was a sharp pain in the ear, and the monotonous tones of his voice were a maddening irritation.

“Miss Treganowen will understand, of course,” he said, “that I hold here only the copy of her grandfather's will, and its contents are new to no one here excepting herself.”

With this preamble he began thus:—

"This is the last will and testament of me, Arthur Crehylls Treganowen, of Treganowen Towers, in the county of Cornwall, Esquire. I give and bequeath all my personal property, of whatever kind or nature, after payment of my just debts, and funeral and testamentary expenses, unto my dear wife, Loveday Alice Treganowen, for her sole and separate use; but in case she shall not be living at the time of my decease, then I give and bequeath the same to my son, Ralph Tregarthen Treganowen. I give and devise all my real estate called Treganowen Towers, situated in the county of Cornwall aforesaid, and all other real estate of which I may die seised, unto Mildred Salome Tremaine, of Treval, in the said county of Cornwall, unto such uses as she may at any time hereafter, by any deed or deeds, or by her last will in writing, direct, limit, and appoint. I nominate, constitute, and appoint my said wife sole executrix of this my will. In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal this fourth day of February, seventeen hundred and eighty.

"ARTHUR CREHYLLS TREGANOWEN.

(L.S.)

"Signed, sealed, published, and declared by the said testator as and for his last will and testament in the presence of us, who, at his request and in his presence, and in the presence of each other, have hereunto subscribed our names as witnesses.

"SAMUEL TRESIDDER, Solicitor, Truro.

"WM. HODGE,
"TOBIAS VINNEY, } Clerks to Mr. Tresidder."

As Mr. Tresidder finished reading this brief testament, he bowed to us, and quitted the room.

Then Miss Mildred rose, and the sad rustle of the satin robe she wore sounded like the flutter of uncertain wings, as though her good spirit fled unwillingly away.

"We meet, Ralph," she said, "not to rake up the dead past, but to build a happy future for you and yours. Surely a wedding *is* a happy thing. But Esther has been brought up in ignorance of facts connected with her family which it is now necessary to reveal. Have I your permission to speak?"

My father bowed his head, but there was a world of pain in the quiet affirmative.

With her hand upon the casket, Miss Mildred opened it, took from it a faded letter, and unfolded it with firm white fingers.

"Ralph—Esther!" she said—O how silvery clear and calm her voice, how stormy

the lurid light of cruel fire in her eyes!—"that will before the world gives me Treganowen, this letter takes it away. Listen."

Then the soft sound of her voice rippled over the ear in sweetest music, such as the moonlight might speak, or the last palest ray of sunset utter in its farewell to the earth, as it dies in a quivering shimmer in the night-shadowed sky.

TO MISS MILDRED SALOME TREMAINE.

"You, Mildred, and you only, have long known of the remorse and sorrow gnawing at my heart. I am a crushed man, but I die repentant, earnestly desiring to do justice. I herein confess my crime that I wickedly conspired against my brother, and by means of my cruel plot I became the cause of his ignominious death. An hour before he mounted the scaffold he sent me a letter by a sure hand. In this, to my amazement, he acknowledged his marriage with a girl of low birth, by whom he had a son and daughter, and he charged me, on pain of his bitter curse, to find his wife and children, and give them their rights of name, position, and fortune. He spoke incoherently of his children, begging me to take heed that he had but one son, who had been stolen, he said, in childhood, and had fallen into bad hands; he might even, he feared, be now a thief. Yet if he could be found he was his

heir, but if my efforts to recover him should fail, then I was to give his daughter £10,000, and to hold his estates in trust until such time as his son, or his son's heirs, could be discovered. Should he, however, have died a dishonourable death, or have married with any other, save a lady by birth or name (and this he said fearing his son's children might be the offspring of some low woman of the gaols,) or should forty years pass over, and his son or grandsons remain unfound, then I was to yield his estates to that one of his daughter's children whom I should select.

"Thus this letter, partially incoherent, and unsigned and unwitnessed, and perchance legally worthless, had yet the sacredness of a will, and God has punished me that I have unheeded it. True, I made some faint efforts to find my brother's widow and children, but they failed; yet lately you and I, Mildred, have reason to think these latter live, and I charge you, as you wish for mercy in heaven, to find my brother's heirs, and fulfil his will as written in his last message to me. And I desire that you will hold my estate in trust, and if his son be unworthy, or have died a shameful death, or if he have intermarried with vice, or his children be illegitimate, then I charge you, after forty years from my brother's death have passed, to yield over the estate of Treganowen to that one of my brother's daughter's children whom you may select or appoint. And I hereby give you the power to make this selection, which my brother delegated to me. And I do hereby beseech and implore you not to take counsel of any one, but to hold all this a secret,

that my brother's ignominious death, and my share therein, may be for ever hidden from the world. And I further beseech you to comfort and help my son Ralph as much as lies in your power. But if he resists your will in aught that you may request in your endeavours to do justice and fulfil my behests, then I charge you, on the curse of a dying man's soul, to proclaim aloud my crime and my brother's crime of mutiny and murder, through mine, for which he suffered death by hanging, that thus Ralph's disobedience to my wishes, expressed through you, may cause the name of Treganowen to become a curse and an infamy to all ages. May God avert this sin from him, and spare you the pain of doing this! And I further pray that you will induce my son Ralph to inhabit Treganowen Towers, that by this and other means you may both hide my guilt and sorrow from evil tongues.

"Mildred, I know your courage and your love, and I die believing that if justice can be done you will do it. I desire you, if God should spare you, to wait twenty-eight years after my death before you bestow Treganowen on that child of my brother's daughter whom you may select, provided, of course, that his son, or son's son, cannot be found. At the end of that period, if you can discover no descendants of my brother's, then act as if they were dead, let my testament remain in force, and God's will be done.

"Mildred, you have refused to let me thank you for the noble secrecy you kept through that bitter time when the world, with Ralph at its head, accused you of murder. One word from you would have

proved your innocence, but that word would have made the name of Treganowen a hissing and a by-word for ever. So you were silent, and I, a cowardly old man, looked on and held my peace. I let you suffer because I loved my son; for the same reason you, Mildred, were content to suffer. Should he ever return to you, and no stronger or holier duty hold you back, accept him for your husband, and may God bless you both!

"When you read out this letter to my brother's son, grandson, or daughter's child, tell, also, that history and secret which you hid at your sister's death. Now that I divulge my guilt, you owe it to yourself to speak.

"I cannot address such a woman as you as a girl, no, nor even as a daughter, for you have been more to me—my consoler, my friend, and helper—the sufferer for my sins, the uncomplaining victim of my son's fickleness and cruelty. Farewell, Mildred! I leave you my honour and my name, and I sign myself,

"Truly your servant, and grateful friend,

"ARTHUR CREHYLLS TREGANOWEN."

The silvery sweet voice of Mildred ceased, and she sank back in her chair with parted lips, grasping the papers with meaningless, nervous fingers. There was a moment of deep silence, painful to the strained ear, then Mildred spoke again.

"Ralph," she said—O how low her tone fell as she uttered that name!—"when your father recorded here his wish that I should speak of my sufferings to his brother's heiress, he could not divine she would be *your* daughter. Shall I speak, or be silent?"

A spasm of pain passed over my father's face.

"Speak, Mildred," he answered. "I wish Esther fully to understand how much I owe to your generosity. She comprehends now the power you have held over me through that letter of my father's, but I want her to feel there was an obligation on my part even greater, which forced me to obey all your wishes. Surely, Mildred, Esther has something to forgive both you and me."

"Do sisters always bring each other happiness?" said Mildred, softly. "I desired above all things that the heiress of Treganowen should be *happy*."

Her face flushed at these words, and the old desolate ring in her voice echoed mournfully in my ear as she spoke again.

“I have always been grieved, Ralph, that you chose exile in India rather than a peaceful life in your own home—I say your *own home*, for who had so great a right to Treganowen as you, the father of its lawful heiress and the husband of Lucy, daughter of Ralph Treganowen and Barbara Polwhele his wife? Ralph, I understand your motive—it was because you would owe nothing to *me*. Esther, Mr. Tresidder will tell you that your father has refused to touch the revenues of Treganowen, which I pressed on him as his legal right as heir-at-law, for the will in reality only gives me a power of appointment. No claimant but you will ever arise to demand of me the moderate sum spent necessarily on the old mansion and gardens. This is the only disbursement, hence the accumulations are immense.”

Long ago I had felt impatient, now I was trembling, burning as with a fire within me, and at the words "no claimant" I started from my seat; then, mindful that my time was not come, I sat down again watchful and silent as before.

Mildred fixed her large eyes on me mournfully, and a quivering movement played over her lips, as though she would have said, "And you too, Esther!"—and there was a motion of her hand, as if she would have held it towards me, but she repressed it, and shading her face she began in a low voice the story of her sister's murder, and her lover's fickleness.

With what exquisite delicacy she touched on this, with what pitying, tender words she told the tale, I can never say.

"Like a ghost ever gliding nearer," she said, "like a red hand coming forth to clutch me, I felt the thought approaching that I had lost Ralph's love. I fled from

it, and wandered alone, crushing my sorrow. One day in the wood, by the old Wishing-well of Treval, where maidens still come to whisper their hopes, I sat down disconsolate. Lost in thought I started at the sound of a rough voice, and looking up I saw a man leaning against a witch elm, watching me.

"You look wisht for a bride, Miss Tremaine," he said. "You are the one who is going to marry Mr. Ralph Treganowen?"

"Yes," I answered with my lips, while my heart said, "No, no, never."

"You think he is heir to many a good acre, don't you?"

Astonished, I simply said "Yes," without another word.

"You are mistaken; he is as good as a beggar," said the man, coarsely. "What will you give me to tell the truth? I risk my life in every word I say."

For a moment I was too bewildered to answer, but in that moment a thousand

hopes rushed through my heart. "O if through this I could win back his lost love!" I thought.

"Name your price," said I.

"My life is worth as much to me as yours to you," he answered. "There are folk would kill me if they knew I had spoken to you. Give me a thousand pounds. I don't ask for payment till after I have proved the truth of my words."

I promised him this sum on that condition, and then heard for the first time the admiral's brother had left wife and children. The first was dead, but the others he could bring forward, and he threatened to do this unless well paid, and to tell them of their rights, of which he declared them now ignorant.

I hastened with this tale to Treganowen, expecting an indignant denial from the admiral, but I witnessed an old man's remorse, and I heard a terrible confession.

Horror stricken, I would have left him, but he implored me for Ralph's sake, and I stayed. For his sake, too, I made the solemn promise he exacted not to tell his son till he was dead.

"Spare me," he said. "Ralph is hot-headed; he would yield up the Towers at once; he would see me and his mother cast forth in ignominy and disgrace. Oh! hide this till we are gone."

I promised, and I kept my word even when Ralph spurned me from him as a murderess.

I confess, when the admiral entreated me to see the man again and bribe him to silence, I was not shocked. How could I bear to see a stranger take the Towers from Ralph? Moreover, the letter of the poor mutineer seemed to me only the emanation of a crazed brain seeking revenge—his children had no *legal* right I felt sure. I was greatly confirmed in this idea when,

on meeting the man again, I found he was a thief—one of a gang of thieves—and I learnt that the supposed heir of Treganowen was a robber also, but he would divulge neither his name nor his abode. The man was evidently held back by some great fear. I found in common with the world in general he fancied Mr. Treganowen was drowned off Bovisand, and of course I was careful not to undeceive him.

I met him often by the admiral's wish, striving to gain the truth from him—striving, perchance, more earnestly to bribe him to hide himself and his story in some distant land. He hesitated—he seemed afraid to do either. One night he hid in terror, declaring he heard the voice of the captain. As the voices drew near I hid also, and in a moment I saw a man pass with my sister Alicia! I saw her face distinctly; his was hidden. I trembled exceedingly, frenzied with fear and horror.

Long after they had passed, I still stood silent beneath the tree where I had crouched.

The man's words roused me. "Our cap'n is after high game," he said. "I wondered what we were lingering here for. I see now what's up. How would you like your sister to run away with a highway-man?"

I burst from him and ran home. I dared tell no one of this shame. I should be asked what *I* was doing in the wood so late. I should ruin Ralph; and to whom could I breathe a word against Alicia's honour? Not to Admonitia, so proud and pure, that she started away in disbelief if the shadow of shame touched her—not to my father—I had killed my mother, should I murder him too by this tale of his favourite daughter's vileness?—not to Ralph, surely—my story would seem to him the cruel calumny of a jealous

heart. So I was silent, and I saw Ralph loving her still, till I grew mad in my misery. Then I spoke to *her*, I warned her, I implored her, and the fierce quarrel Mr. Winterdale partly overheard was set down to my rage and hate against her for Ralph's sake.

At last the man gave me information that would have led to the discovery of young Treganowen, but to find him would be to find a robber, to disgrace the name of Treganowen, to beggar Ralph. I would not tell the admiral of this discovery. I resolved to *keep* Treganowen for Ralph and his children. I had always resolved this. I have kept my resolve through murder and death, and anguish unutterable.

Mildred rose to her full height, and her large eyes dilated with joy and triumph. Again I would have started up, but the man and the signal I was expecting came not.

"I bribed the ruffian," said Mildred, "to go to America, and carry his story with him; but before I could give him the money Alicia had fled, and I was a prisoner. I was silent through all. Was I to tell that I suspected my sister was the paramour of a robber? Was I to bring the grey hairs of my father to the grave? Was I to proclaim to the world that my betrothed was enjoying rights not his? Was I to make an old man—his father, my friend—bow his head in shame, and die disgraced—a felon, the brother of a felon? Could I think of him and of Ralph cast out of the old Towers of Treganowen dishonoured, and not nerve my soul to suffer all things rather than speak? I have finished," concluded Mildred, abruptly. "You know the rest."

My God! how the hot iron of her martyrdom quivered through my flesh and entered my soul! I pictured to myself the old

admiral granting the warrant for her arrest ; I saw my father's fever of love and hate, his fury against her, his repulsion of that pure little silken hand, lovely still, true to him still, shading now the flush that crimsoned her worn cheek. I turned to my father ; he had hidden his face in his hands ; but in a moment he rose, and hurried towards Miss Mildred and took her hands. Words broke from his lips incoherently, wildly—words of worship and tenderness.

“Mildred ! Mildred !” he said, “O God ! how you have suffered !”

To my surprise his touch seemed to change her to a blaze of fury.

“How do you know what I have suffered ? Let me go, Ralph Treganowen !” she cried, in a voice of anguish. “Your touch maddens me. You are blind—blind ; you will never see the truth—never. Admonitia, help me ! help me to hide from him this

horror in our house. Do not let me strike him dead with it. But as you and I know it, as God knows it, so will He forgive me for the terrible revenge I take upon you and yours. No, do not think to soothe me with a touch; wait till you hear the truth, and know that I have brought hatred, dissension, and perhaps death into your house, as you did into mine."

"Esther," she turned to me more calmly, "the admiral's brother, it is true, left two children; but it is only your mother Lucy who was born after the marriage of Ralph Treganowen and Barbara Polwhele. Her brother is a robber, and illegitimate. I scorn any claim that may arise through him. Do not fear, then, that you commit an injustice by taking your inheritance."

Had my face told anything that she said this?

"This letter, Esther, charges me to select an heir for Treganowen. I select you. I

appoint you. All will be done legally. When I ring this bell, lawyers and witnesses will enter to see me sign the deed which gives you your estates. I could not bestow them on Ralph, but that they might be his child's, I induced him to marry Lucy Treganowen, winning him over to my will by the urgent commands of his father, and by touching his generosity and pity on Lucy's behalf—not telling her who she really was, but as an orphan, young, forlorn, poor, unacknowledged by kindred, an unjust slur on her birth. If I have been unjust to anyone it is to Lucy, in not divulging the truth to her; but she was not a woman to keep another's secret, and if money be any recompense for this slight wrong, she has had it. I thought her brother was dead when she went to India. Ralph, allying you to him is the sole harm poor Lucy has done you."

"It is one easily forgiven," said my father.

His tone was cold, and I could see a sort of wonder on his face at Miss Mildred's change of manner.

"If he had seen Paul as I have—if he knew he was a murderer!" I thought.

"Mildred," interposed Admonitia, "you are weary; let me tell the rest. Esther, you have a sister, whose existence we have kept a secret from you all your life long. Your father's and mother's consent to this secrecy is the only price we exacted from them for all our benefits to Lucy, and for sorrows received from Ralph. You do not seem surprised or pleased. You do not know her, you cannot love her; well, it is better so, for to-morrow your happiness, when you give your hand to Stephen, will be her death-blow."

My father started from his chair, but, overpowered by emotion, speech failed him.

"It is true," said Mildred. "Ralph, your daughter Alice loves Stephen Tremaine, and

I return into your bosom some of the anguish you have brought to this house. Until I could show you the depths of hell in sisters' hearts when jealousy comes between them, I would not see your face."

"Mildred—Esther?" cried my father, as, staggering beneath her words, he caught me by the hand.

"Esther," continued Miss Mildred, in the calm voice of gratified vengeance, "I have not sinned against you. I have guarded *your* peace. To-morrow, lovely and beloved, you will leave happily with your husband. Your father will never witness the strife and misery he brought here; he will only see the anguish of *one* daughter; he will only see Alice grieve, and pine, and die."

"And she will not be *murdered*!" cried Admonitia, with flashing eyes.

"Hush!" said Mildred, gently. "Esther"—and her voice sank to a tender whisper—"you do not care for this sister; surely I

have not marred your happiness by my *justice*. You love Stephen, and you have won his heart from Alice by your beauty and genius. Enjoy your victory and your wealth, and let Alice weep, or laugh, grow hard and perish, what is it to you?"

"She is my sister," said I, softly. "O God! will he never come," I cried inwardly.

But here the passion of my heart broke forth, and violently releasing myself from my father's trembling grasp, I sprang forward, crying—

"Miss Mildred, a few moments ago I pitied you—I loved you. Now I hate you! Listen! I knew days ago I had a sister—a twin sister—from whom in your far-seeing plot of vengeance you parted me. And you have made me your tool to stab her and my father to the heart, but your weapon fails you. This day I parted with Stephen Tremaine for ever, and Alice will never know he loved me. I refuse to be his wife!

I utterly scorn him. I would not take his fickle hand in mine for worlds, warm as it is with a sister's clasp. I stifle at the thought; and I refuse to accept Treganowen. It is not mine! it belongs to Hubert Treganowen, the son of my mother's *legitimate* brother."

As the fire of my passion poured from my eyes and lips, as my burning words streamed over her, Miss Mildred sank slowly to the floor, and clasping her forehead with one hand, she gazed at me wildly.

"The work of so many years destroyed," she murmured—"this heir whom I have sought not to discover, but to hide, found. Ralph's child will not have Treganowen! What is this? There is a fire in my brain—I am going mad. Oh, Esther, am I thwarted and disappointed in all my hopes?"

She sank lower, and bowed her head on Admonitia's knees.

I did not answer, I did not heed her. I was clinging to my father.

"Yes, yes, I have seen Alice. Reassure yourself—there is no dissension, no hate, no grief; my love is gone like a summer cloud—what if it leave a little rain, a few tears, they will not harm me. Let Treganowen go to its rightful owner;" and I wrung my hands because Hubert was so good, so generous, and I so fickle, so unworthy, he would never love me again—never—never. "Oh, come away! Let us leave this wicked woman who fancied because she had lied and plotted to save your lands, that we should accept her gifts and endure her vengeance. Come away, my father, and leave her to God."

Slowly Miss Mildred had raised her bowed head, and listened to my incoherent words; her face was deadly pale, her heart seemed broken.

"Esther!" she said, and her desolate cry

rang through the room, "I have loved you!"

There was no time for answer. There was the hurried tramp of feet, the sound of voices, then the door was thrust open, and Mr. Winterdale, Mr. Tresidder, and two others entered. There was something in their aspect which arrested the breath on the lips and turned the heart cold.

"Miss Mildred Tremaine," said Mr. Winterdale, as he laid his hand on her shoulder, "I arrest you on the charge of concealing your sister Alicia a prisoner in this house. Here is our warrant to search the mansion of Treval from roof to cellar."

"It is come," answered Mildred, with the calmness and pallor of death. "Who is the traitor?—who is my accuser?"

"Esther Treganowen!" responded Mr. Winterdale in a tone of triumph.

With eyes blazing with ire and scorn, Miss Admonitia turned towards me.

"How could dishonour and disgrace and treachery touch the house of Tremaine save through a Treganowen?" she said.

Sorrow and amazement kept me dumb, for the moment I was accused my father thrust me roughly from him, and strode to the side of Miss Mildred.

"If Esther has brought this wild, wicked accusation against you, Mildred, she is no daughter of mine," he cried.

"It is Esther," said Mr. Winterdale, as he clutched me by the arm. "This girl—my tool—the weapon by which I have ripped open this vile wickedness—Esther the SOMNAMBULIST!"

CHAPTER X.


LIKE an electric shock his words rushed through my brain, and turning deathly pale, I sprang forward, and should have fallen, but for the cruel grasp upon my arm which held me up.

“Ah,” said Mr. Winterdale, “here is the instrument by which I have tracked this woman’s guilt, step by step, home to her hearth and her heart; this slight, fragile girl, who has done it unwittingly and unwillingly. At times I have despaired, for till she came down here again to the air of this dungeon, her disease took only such shapes as were worthless to me—music, drawings, song; but *now*——” and he drew forth from his pocket a manuscript, the very

manuscript the old ghost-layer hid from me every night!—"now," and his voice roared in triumph, "I have the whole history under the Somnambulist's hand. See! she names it the history of that 'Blank Time Spent at Treval,' when it seems, as a child, labouring under another phase of that mysterious disease, of which I have taken advantage to track out this secret, these cruel gaolers availed themselves of the strange, rare powers of genius, and of song developed in her then, to soothe their unhappy prisoner."

"Gentlemen, what need of delay? A search is unnecessary; this manuscript tells us the secret of the red room, and points out the entrance to the prison."

"I am here as the Misses Tremaine's solicitor," observed Mr. Tresidder. "I claim to see the search-warrant before I permit any one to take a single step from this room."



It was shown to him, and then it appeared it was granted at the instance of Mr. Winterdale and Dominica. As I heard her name read out, I divined at once that she had followed me in my strange sleep and seen the spot, not where the ghost-layer, but where I, with my own hands, bound in the chains of mysterious slumber, had hidden my history.

Long before Mr. Winterdale had ceased to speak, Mildred's lips uttered softly the words, "My poor Esther!" and my arms were clasped around her, and I was weeping bitterly, forgetting alike her vengeance and her guilt, ere his speech was done.

And now Mr. Winterdale with fierce eagerness led the way, and we all followed. I held Miss Mildred's hand—had she been a murderess I must have held it—she rested her other hand on my father's arm. He was incredulous, proud, scornful, she only sorrowful, with a gleam of joy in her eyes

like the martyr's at the crowning stroke. Up the great staircase, through the corridor, past the chambers from whose long line of windows I had looked down on the cedar-tree, we hurried with rapid step. Faster and faster beat my heart as we neared Miss Mildred's chamber. When we entered the sitting-room she looked round it, like one bidding a last farewell, and I shuddered as I said, "She is thinking of the prison where she will soon lie, shut out from the pure air, the light, the beauty, the home of this dear place." As the thought came and went, we passed down the steps, and entered the pretty chamber, so purely white, so freshly green, where this pale, strange, still woman, silent and self-resolved, had hidden her secret so long.

Martha was there, and looked around upon us with an amazed air, blanching suddenly to fear.

"It is finished," said Mildred softly; and

at her words the old servant fell into a chair and covered her face.

“ Good heavens ! ” I exclaimed to myself, “ is there any mystery *here* ?—in this simple chamber ! Are we all mad ? ”

Mr. Winterdale was looking at my unhappy narrative, which fluttered in his nervous hand.


“ Remove the steps ! ” he said.

Then a thrill of fear shot through me, which passed like an electric flash through every stander-by, as Dominica, directed by Mr. Winterdale, stooped, and pulled aside the three polished steps which formed the descent from the sitting-room to the chamber. They masked a small arched passage, which looked strangely drear in the falling dusk. There was no time for thought, for speech ; crowding on each other and breathless we entered, and in a moment found ourselves in a long, low chamber, nearly dark. We left day, and the last golden

glow of a stormy sunset in Miss Mildred's room, and here we came upon the night. For a moment we scarcely saw each other's faces, and the place appeared empty and silent, then there grew out of the gloom, crouching towards us in the old terrible attitude, the pale, worn profile I had watched from the cedar-tree; the white, woe-begone face I had seen on the roof. With frightened, helpless look she came, like one not strong in sense, and alas! blind—stone-blind!—listening, turning her head from side to side, groping with her hands she came, while every voice, every breath was still, and every eye in horror followed her movements.

At last with outstretched fingers she touched Mildred's robe, then a smile—so strange and sweet, so wondrously changing the death-white face—broke over her lips.

"Is it only you?" she said. "Mildred, my Mildred, is it only you?"



Tears, hot, fast, scalding tears, the first I had ever seen on that proud cheek, fell from Mildred's eyes, then she drew the blind, crouching figure to her breast, gently as we draw a child.

"Alicia! my poor Alicia!" she said, but her voice broke, and for a single moment through the gathering storm and darkness not a sound was heard. Then Miss Admonitia broke the silence, and not a falter shook the ring of her clear, patrician voice as she spoke—

"Gentlemen, you have laid bare the secret of our house, and the cruel martyrdom of my sister Mildred. I am glad of it. She will be relieved now from the long, loathsome misery inflicted on her by a mad impostor."

At these words the poor worn figure, clinging to Mildred, turned her face hopelessly to the voice, and then, with the caressing action of the blind, laid her

band on Mildred's cheek and felt the tears.

"Not for me, Mildred," she said hurriedly. "Oh, not for me, who have made you suffer so much. I do not heed Admonitia's disbelief—am I not used to it? What has happened?—who are here?—strangers?"

"I repeat impostor," continued Admonitia, in a firmer tone. A woman who has known how to work on Mildred's weakness by all the details she heard from Alicia when she was in the hands of robbers, a woman who saw her slain—who is doubtless criminal as the thieves her companions. Take her, gentlemen. It will be a day of joy for me when this blind, pitiable object, who, walking in the fear of death from her accomplices, dared come hither praying to be hidden from the world—shall cease to wither my heart, and turn my blood to fire, by her assumption of Alicia's name.

Mildred, will you never be undeceived? Ralph, speak! tell her that it is only her eyes that see, in this poor, blind, half-idiot cripple, Alicia Tremaine."

My father might have spoken, but Mr. Winterdale broke in with cool, sarcastic voice—

"You are a clever woman, Miss Admonitia. How did this *impostor* come hither?"

"She came in the dead of night, and, standing by Mildred's bed, dared claim her help, and call herself Alicia Tremaine. From the real Alicia, from that poor girl murdered in her presence, she had doubtless learnt the secret of this old, useless, long-forgotten room."

The pride, the contempt in Admonitia's voice had turned another man to stone, but Mr. Winterdale simply said—

"A clever tale. Gentlemen, let us do our duty. The officers wait below to re-

move the prisoner. Miss Mildred, it is a long drive to Bodmin gaol, and the night is stormy; instant departure is best."

As he finished his cruel speech, and ere the low cry that rose from my lips had burst from them, a door opened at the end of the long, low room—a door I had not noticed in the obscurity—and a man's face looked within. Coming from the outer light on the darkness, his eyes wore a dazed, bewildered expression, changing suddenly to fear and desperation as he saw the crowd. But before I could understand that this was the man for whom I had waited so long that night, before I could even *see* him with my full sense, Mr. Winterdale rushed towards him, exclaiming—

"Ah, villain!—have I got you at last? Have I hunted you through the world to find you *here*? Clear the blot from Alicia's name. Give me the certificate of her marriage!"

"I will not be taken alive. Stand back!" shouted the man. "I fire at the foremost! who is this? Have the dead risen?"

Something gleamed in his hand as he spoke, and—O God! the poor, worn figure they called Alicia Tremaine, shrieking at the sound of his voice, rushed by as if to hide, and passed his pistol, in her blindness not knowing it, nor comprehending the danger, the death that menaced her.

With a bitter cry Miss Mildred sprang before her.

"Hold your hand, Paul Polwhele!" she cried. "Will you murder your wife?"

It was too late, or, perchance, her very words caused the deed, for the pistol flashed in the robber's hand, and she fell like one dead, while the pale figure of Alicia passed on scathless.

Blinded by tears, anguish, horror, I leant over Miss Mildred, and strove to raise her, while Miss Admonitia, like one bereft of


reason, knelt by her side, aiding me, but my father, dashing us aside, took her in his arms and laid her on the bed, standing dimly in the gloom like a bier near us.

"Oh God! is she much hurt?" whispered Admonitia.

It was a whisper to be heard in the very blood, and at the sound Mildred opened her eyes. Her looks, her words deceived us.

"Not much," she said, gently. "I shall soon be well. Ralph, you will forgive me my vengeance now you have seen Alicia. Look—that is what unsisterly strife and hate have made her! That is what I have had before my eyes so many burning years. I never thought to show it to you—this fruit of hate and passion. O God! do men know what they do, when by loving two sisters they put fire from the pit into their hearts?"

"Not now, my dear Mildred," said my



father; "we will not speak of these things now. Who is gone for a surgeon?"

"She speaks strongly; she is not much hurt," murmured Admonitia, gladly. "Oh! do not hold that wretched woman's hand now, Mildred. You see Ralph feels she is not Alicia."

For answer, Mildred turned and kissed the woe-worn woman on the brow; while she, holding out her hand with a grey and troubled look, said in the tone of one long accustomed to disbelief—

"Ralph Treganowen, I am indeed Alicia."

Then, as if the unwonted excitement was too much for her weak sense, she shrank down, cowering at Mildred's feet in silence.

"See!" cried Admonitia with a shudder, "how to gain shelter and safety here she works upon a noble heart, inflicting a torture of which her base nature cannot dream."

"Esther!" cried the voice of Paul, hoarsely, "you know the truth, tell it. God knows I am sorry for this; I never thought to hurt Miss Mildred. Men! let me pass. I am desperate!"

Who had thought of the assassin? No hand had seized him. And now he was gone. I heard a cry, a rush of feet, but I could not look. My eyes were filled with a mist of tears, for I saw a grey, cold shadow creeping over Mildred's face, and I knew its name was death. She put out her hand feebly, groping for some one's touch. Was it for me?—for my father? No, it was for Admonitia.

Strangling with emotion, crushed with grief, the tall stately woman knelt by the bed choked with sobs.

"Admonitia," said Mildred, in a voice faint, low, dying, as taking her hand she laid it on Alicia's head, "promise me, ere I go, that to you this poor, worn spirit shall

never be an impostor more, but your sister—your veritable sister. Esther, I leave her to *you*. Ralph, I have sinned much, but not as Mr. Winterdale thinks. Admonitia, there are papers—in my desk—for Ralph—Esther.”

Then with dying energy, with a stronger voice, as we withdrew from her lips the wine with which we wetted them, she cried—

“Save Alicia from her husband !”

“Oh, Miss Mildred !” I sobbed, “do not die thinking your sister is Paul’s wife, or, worse, his victim. Let me give you one gleam of joy. She is the wife of my mother’s legitimate brother—she is the wife of Alan Treganowen.”

At the sound of my words a cry broke from Alicia’s lips.

“Alan ! Alan ! My child ?” she said wildly. “Will you let Paul destroy my child ?”

My lips trembled exceedingly as I pressed them to Miss Mildred's hand, and forced myself to speak.

"Your son is safe," I said. "Mr. Winterdale has been to him as a father. Hubert is good, noble; worthy, indeed, of the ancient Towers and the inheritance over which we have all fought so long."

A deep sadness, darker than death, shadowed Miss Mildred's face. I put my ear to her lips. I heard her faint words—

"Esther, you think to give me joy. You wither my last hopes. I have sinned, suffered in vain. Treganowen is lost to Ralph for ever."

O God! what would I not have given to have been able to say—"No, no, Miss Mildred! Hubert loves me. In his far-seeing generosity he determined to be, not my father's enemy, but his son; not the legal despoiler making me penniless, but the

tender friend, lover, husband, who should make me rich—richest of all in his love.”

I could not say it. I was entirely unworthy now. I could never run to Hubert's breast for shelter again. Miss Mildred had made me her tool—made me love Stephen, and the scarlet thread that marred the fair web of her life—the desire for vengeance—saddened her death, and tied my faltering tongue.

Utterly broken-hearted that I could not give her this joy, that I must let her die in her sorrow without one gleam of hope, I looked at her and cried—

“Mildred! Mildred!”

My father could not speak. With his arm around her, with his eyes fastened on her face, he held even her last breath greedily, keeping us from her side.

“No, no,” said Mildred faintly to her sister and Martha, who were striving to stanch the blood from her wound, “let me

be. You pain me; let me die without pain. I have had so much pain—so much pain in my life.”

At touch of the blood-stained linen which Martha drew gently away, some sense of the truth awoke in the unhappy Alicia's dimmed mind.

“She is dying for me,” she said, as a great horror came into her face; “but has she not been dying for me all her life long?”

As she spoke I saw my father shrink away from her with pain and disgust. I saw him fix his eyes on Mildred's pale face, then he stooped and kissed her, and as her lips broke into a smile of joy she died.

CHAPTER XI.

"GENTLEMEN," said Miss Admonitia—and no faltering marred her clear intonation, no stoop in her stately form—"your prisoner has escaped you. My sister is dead. As for the poor creature whom she has succoured so long, I ask you to let her remain at Treval, for I have promised"—there was a quiver here, a pathos all the more deep because it struggled so hard for strength—"never to call her impostor more. I wish to be kind to her, and to protect her to the end, out of respect to the strong belief my Mildred held that she is indeed Alicia Tremaine. Mr. Tresidder, I can rely on you. Lord Roscorla"—Admonitia turned to the magistrate who had accompanied

Mr. Winterdale—"I ask of you a favour. For the sake of my two sisters, both brought to a violent death through the changes in the hot heart of Ralph Treganowen, I intreat you to keep secret the fact that this poor outcast usurps Alicia's name. Let my murdered sisters sleep in peace. I shall soon follow them. Do not harass my last days by tearing from the silence of the grave all the sorrowful history these deaths cover."

"Miss Tremaine," answered Lord Roscorla in a tone of deep pity, "if the assassin of your sister be taken, nothing can keep this story from being known. And then I fear your share in the crime of this long concealment of this person—whether she be Alicia Tremaine or no—will be proved against you. For myself I believe your motives pure, but the world may think otherwise. Can I help you!" Lowering his voice, "Will you leave England?"

"No," said Miss Admonitia, turning proudly away.

I had heard that in youth Lord Roscorla had loved Miss Admonitia, but she had refused him because of the sorrow and shame at Treval, which she was too proud to let another share.

He followed her now anxiously.

"If I can keep this secret," he said, earnestly, "I will. Escape, Admonitia," he added, softly; "there is no warrant out against you, and your sister is beyond human justice."

"I have wronged no one," answered Admonitia, with mournful pride. Mildred and I succoured, cherished, nursed for years a poor wanderer, demented and blind—that is our crime. And we hid her because she called herself Alicia Tremaine. Could we let our sister's fame be given to the winds, or permit a woman calling herself by her name to perish in a ditch?"

Thus spoke Miss Admonitia — proud to the last, willing still to be a martyr or a criminal for the honour of the Tremaines.

“Where is Mr. Winterdale?” said I, speaking through my tears. “I have a narrative, given me by Paul Polwhele, which he must read. Fetch him, Lord Roscorla, I entreat you.”

We had all quitted the chamber of death, and were standing in Miss Mildred's sitting-room when I spoke.

“Mr. Winterdale is not here,” answered Mr. Tresidder. “He has pursued the assassin, with some of the servants. It seems he took advantage of our sudden horror to escape by some secret way to the garden. A man saw him emerge from a little staircase behind some window below, but, paralysed by alarm, failed to seize him. I fear he has escaped altogether.”

Mr. Tresidder's fears were true. Paul got safely to the village of Trevalla by the

sea ; there a woman gathering limpets saw him get into a little boat evidently awaiting him, and through the darkness and storm that had lashed Treval through all this dreadful day and night he pushed off from the rock-bound beach. Panting, furious, having distanced his companions, the man who had pursued him so many years tracked his steps, and too impatient to wait for aid, seeing Paul's tiny skiff in the gleam of the stormy moon, he launched a fisherman's boat lying on the shore and followed in pursuit.

It was a fearful night, but what mattered darkness or storm to this relentless hunter of men ? He who had tracked down Miss Mildred through so many cruel, remorseless, slowly-winding paths, was resolved now to lay his hand on Paul Polwhele.

Through all that night—a night to be remembered for ever—we waited for tidings.

None came. No eye ever saw, no ear ever heard aught more of those two men. God alone knows what happened, or whether they met, but on the gloomy evening of the second day after Mildred's death, the sullen waves subsiding in their fury cast upon the shore the body of Paul Polwhele. He was buried in the churchyard of Trevalla, but no voice dared read a sacred word over his grave. Mr. Winterdale was never seen again alive or dead.

And now, having brought my story thus far, it is time I laid before you that narrative of Paul's of which I have spoken; but as I find the paper, alluded to by Miss Mildred, will render the former clearer and more comprehensible, I transcribe this the first. I have called it—

MILDRED'S CONFESSION.

MILDRED'S CONFESSION.

FOUND IN HER DESK BY ESTHER TREGANOWEN.

"When I looked upon the face of the murdered girl brought to the north porch, I knew she was *not* my sister Alicia. But I saw my father recover from a death-sickness in the tranquillity of that belief; I saw Admonitia relieved and thankful; the hot search, the fever of suspense, the anguish of hope were over, and I hesitated to speak my doubts. Moreover, was there not a hope now that Ralph, thinking she was dead, would come back to me—me, whose heart bled for him? If, too, this were Alicia, the world would see I had had no hand in her death; the persecution, the trial, the prison, the torture would be spared me; my father's grey hairs would be saved from the grave; Mr. Winterdale would relax his vengeance; and Ralph would be *sorry for me*; while if this were *not* Alicia, a horrible complication was added to the mystery, and I was still a prisoner. I held my peace. I ask for no pity. I was a coward, and I know it. But I was a coward for Ralph. I was afraid that I should not have strength to bear the loneliness of the prison, the torture of trial, and the load of hate and suspicion around me; I had not power for more suffering. I was breaking down now; stretched longer on the rack I should tell my secret and disgrace the family of Treganowen, and make Ralph a beggar and an exile.

"Now the sight of Ralph's face, though it looked upon me with horror, gave me courage, but in prison I could see him no more, and the loneliness and the


pain would force me to speak. Would to Heaven I could have felt surer of myself, but I did not! Under Ralph's hate my spirit was sinking, and I dared not thrust myself into further suffering.

"Then I tried to persuade myself that this poor corpse was Alicia—the real Alicia. Had I not seen her myself with one of the ruffian gang, and what more likely than this, that, deceived, dishonoured, betrayed, she had at last been murdered? She went willingly I knew; but who would believe me now if I said so? To all the world—even to Admonitia—I should seem like one inventing a slanderous tale to screen herself from suspicion. Moreover, *I could not* inflict such shame and pain upon my father and Ralph. My tongue would have scorched me had I tried. And surely this was, this must be, Alicia; to doubt was to ruin all dear to me.

"Thus I quieted my conscience, and asked myself why my eyes alone saw in this girl the face of a stranger, while others rained down tears on her, and cried, 'O Alicia! Alicia!'

"Once when Mrs. Treganowen said sorrowfully that I was either hard of heart, or else cruelly glad that my sister was dead, else I should surely weep for her, I ventured to hint to her my doubt. But I seemed to her like one that was mad, or like a heartless woman excusing herself for a crime by falsehood.

"Alicia's death set me free, saved the Treganowens, gave me hope. God forgive me that I stifled the truth, arrayed myself in black, went to the funeral, and looked sorrowful as for a sister! Still, when I saw this girl—a stranger—laid in the vault of the



Tremaines—when I saw Ralph fling himself down in grief, my heart melted like wax within me, and but for the dead faintness into which I fell, I should have proclaimed the truth aloud. Restored to consciousness, I met Mr. Winterdale's eyes gazing down into mine, and the horrible thought struck me that he knew what I knew, and felt what I felt. But he was silent, and I could only shudder and be silent also.

“The admiral died, racked by pride and the fear of disgrace to the last. His will gave me all power, and I resolved to use it, not to find his brother's heir, but to keep Treganowen for Ralph. The man who knew the secret was dead, the children of Barbara he swore were ignorant of their rights—let them perish, so Ralph kept his inheritance, how could I care!

“For two years I was left tranquil, save for sad thoughts, then anonymous letters reached me, demanding money on pain of divulging the sin and sorrow hidden by Alicia's death. The writer averred that she had fled willingly with a robber, and that her hand alone had admitted the gang to Treval. She called herself a wife, but this was false, he said, and unless I would bring dishonour on the name of Tremaine, I must buy his secrecy by money. I showed these letters to Admonitia, thinking that now, at least, the suspicion would arise in her mind that no man would write thus unless Alicia were still living, still dishonouring us all. But no, she treated the letters with utter scorn and disbelief, although the bare suspicion of such a shame, and her love and pity for me, made her steadfastly refuse the man she loved.

“Three years passed, and Ralph returned to me

wiser and sadder, repentant and sorrowful. I scarcely dared believe in his renewed love. I scarcely dared think I could be happy. He had come to me because he was impatient, moody, restless, and I alone comprehended him; I alone knew the secrets of his family and the secrets of his heart. He talked continually of Alicia—to him I saw she was a martyred angel—pure, beautiful, too good for earth. But she was dead, and next to her he loved me. Strangely enough, he said, through all his passion for her he had loved me—loved me, calmly, dearly—and this love continued till he suspected me of—he dared not say the word murder, so he stopped.

“‘If she were living still, should you love me?’ I asked.

“‘Do not ask me that again, Mildred,’ he answered; ‘my heart throbs at the thought with such sick pain that I cannot bear it.’

“‘I knew Alicia lived, and yet in my craving love I half resolved to be Ralph’s wife, and keep the secret of my passionate heart from him for ever. ‘If she conceals herself for this robber’s sake, may I do nothing for Ralph’s sake?’ I asked myself.

“‘I did not at this time show him his father’s letter, only he guessed that the will—which never vexed him—hid rather than expressed his father’s wishes. One day he even said he thought the admiral had left Treganowen to me, because he knew we should marry, and he asked me if this were not the secret of the will.

“‘I knew his father had told him the true circumstances of his uncle’s death, and now I ventured to suggest he might have left children, but the hint angered him almost to fury.

" 'My uncle was mad,' he said, 'and if he wrote such a thing to my father it was the thought of a diseased brain longing for revenge.'

"I seized on this idea eagerly. What more likely to strike the poor madman than such a plot as this to destroy his brother's peace? How was it I had not thought of this before?

" 'My father wrote to me just before his death, Mildred,' said Ralph, 'begging me to return to Treganowen. If his brother had left children with legal claims would he have said this? No. And he knew that leaving the Towers to you was leaving them to me.'

"The generosity, the largeness of heart with which Ralph had borne this apparently cruel will, and the ingenuousness of spirit with which he had come back to me when narrow minds would have feared misinterpretation, or nourished resentment, touched me to the soul. Never once did he suspect me—never once did he think I should suspect him—of mercenary feelings. Yet he loved Treganowen, and he owned that love candidly, saying simply—

" 'My father left our old Towers to you because he knew no other woman but you could be my wife, no other man but I could be your husband. He did it to show his trust in us, but, above all, in you, and his belief in the affection that existed still, beneath that great storm of passion for Alicia, that wrecked my peace.'

"Then I said, in my hot, sorrow-flooded heart, 'I will marry Ralph—I will hide his father's letter—he shall have Treganowen—there are no heirs—the hanged man was mad—and the robber who met me in the wood was a liar.'

"I had always slept in the red room where the brothers had fought, and the Puritan had stabbed the Cavalier to the heart. I had ever persisted in the true tale, that Alicia had entered this room and come to my bedside on the night of her disappearance. Admonitia had endeavoured to persuade me this was a dream, and finding me persist in my assertion, she strove to induce me to change my room. I did not yield to this wish. I had a superstitious fancy that if Alicia were living she would come to me here.

"Connected with the legend of the red room was a tradition that the Cavalier had been hidden at Treval by his sister in some secret chamber, and although apparently none existed, I had faith in the tradition.

"One evening, in spite of my hidden sorrows, and, above all, the aching fear that Ralph had only returned to me because he thought Alicia dead, I was happy, for I had parted with him tenderly, and with a smile on my lips, I sat down on a couch by my fireside in the red room, and dreamed away the hours in love dreamings. Door after door had closed at a distance, and footsteps died into silence, and the house grew strangely still, then I became conscious that it was late—very late; and a shivering fear and loneliness crept over me, and these holding me like a spell, I could not rouse myself to undress, but sat gazing at the wall opposite fixedly like one expecting a spectre. As I gazed, there grew a shadow on it never there before, and with the shadow a gentle grating sound; then, as I live, I saw the steps slowly moving outwards, and in the dark space they left there stood a crouching figure—the figure of a woman—unwomanly, bowed, and broken.

dreadful to the sight. No shriek burst from my lips, I said to myself, 'My hour is come : I knew she was living—I knew she would come again to mar my short-lived happiness.' And before she had uttered a word, my hollow voice had whispered—

“ ‘Alicia, is it you?’

“Creeping, groping towards me, like one bereft of senses—like one bowed down by grief and pain unutterable—she came and fell down at my feet speechless, her hands clasped together, famine, anguish, patience on her face.

“I stooped over her, I lifted her in my arms ; she was cold and wet ; her garments were ragged, travel-stained, dreadful to the touch. Terror, loathing, pity kept me silent, as I laid her on the couch, and gazed on her like one turned to stone. There was something strange about her—something more pitiful still than even the misery into which she had fallen—and, looking on her, I was wondering what that something was, when she spoke—

“ ‘Mildred, I am blind !’

“I fell upon my knees, for there was no strength left in me at her words. I strove to speak—no voice came to my lips. In the breathless silence she heard my fall, and stretched out her hand upon me.

“ ‘Mildred, are you faint?’

“ ‘No.’ I held my heart tightly with my hands, that the flood of pity rushing into it might not kill me ; but when I felt her fingers passing over my face with the groping action peculiar to the blind, my heart broke with sorrow, and from that moment began my living death.

" 'I am not worth weeping for,' she said, in a low voice. 'Give me food, Mildred ; I am faint.'

" Looking upon her worn face, so horribly changed, so meaningless in its blindness, so haggard in its suffering, I read famine and misery in every line.

" Mildred, I have begged my way hither from Bristol,' she said.

" I rose from my knees. 'I will fetch you something,' I answered, hurriedly, for her words were a knife in my side ; 'but I fear I must take the light and leave you in the dark.'

" 'Leave me in the dark ! Oh, Mildred, where is there any light for me now ?'

" Oh God ! what a desolate cry was hers ! I passed through years of pain as I heard it, and every nerve thrilled and quivered beneath the soft, low accent of her voice.

" Silently, and like a thief I crept through the house and fetched her food and wine, and piteously she held her cup to my lips, with dumb entreaty imploring me to eat and drink with her. I understood her—we do not break bread with an enemy—so I tasted the bread and wine. I took that sacrament of forgiveness with her, and now for the first time tears rained down from her darkened eyes and from mine—mine less blessed in that they saw this pitiable sight. I would fain have put her into my bed, but she would not lie there.

" 'Let me stay here by the fire,' she said ; 'I could not sleep there, Mildred.'

" She sank to sleep suddenly, just after I had arrayed her in clean white linen from my wardrobe, and no sooner did she slumber than a great longing seized

upon me to walk through the house and arouse all the sleepers, and tell them that Alicia—the woman whose corpse they had laid in the vault at Trevalla—was here, alive, haunting my chamber with a terrible likeness of herself—blind—fearful—maddening me. But I struggled with this desire and trampled it down, knowing that if I awoke them in the dead of night with such news I should seem to them as one who raved. No I must hear her story, and gather my evidence together before I could force belief upon them. And I would do it. I would brave the shock, the horror, the amazement to my father, the pain to Admonitia, for should they deem this poor wanderer an impostor, a mad woman, would not the fault be mine, because in my cowardice and my love for Ralph I held my tongue when they placed yonder poor corpse in the church among the Tremaines who sleep by the sea?

“Thus thinking, I locked my door and waited for the morning.

“Let not any one dream that this night to me was alive with horror and anguish. No! it was dead—everything was dead—there was no life in or around me. And in the darkness of that death the shadow of a second sight came down upon me, and I saw and knew all I had to suffer; and yet not feeling it, I sat in heavy stupor while the hours tolled dolefully for my departed spirit, and the wild bells at Trevalla rang out my requiem to the stormy sea.

“I had forgotten it was New Year's Eve till the bells awoke me with a clash like a death-shriek, then I knew that sorrow and I had begun the year together, in pale companionship with this buried woman lying

there, pallid in the fitful light of my fading fire. Morning came at last, bringing life again, but not the life of yesterday; that could never come more to me. It was a death-life now that moved me—no joy, no love, no peace, no bounding throbs in my aching veins now—only suffering, suffering—O my God! only suffering!

“‘Mildred! Mildred! a happy new year!’ cried the voice of Ralph under my window. ‘Say, am I the first to wish it?’

“At the sound of his voice I started to my feet and threw my arms wildly upwards. I dared not go to the window; there was something too terrible on my face. Human nature cannot endure to see the aspect some sufferings take. In very pity we must not let a fellow-mortal gaze upon the features despair and horror wear; instinctively we hide it when our pain grows too mighty for our fleshy mask. And so, although he could not see me, I covered my face with my mantle and waited in silence, till, weary of calling, he wandered down the lawn, deeming me asleep or careless.

“‘Hide me away,’ said Alicia pitifully as she awoke. ‘I cannot let Admonitia or my father see me. O Mildred! if you will not consent to hide me, I will say I am a beggar-woman, and I will go out on the moor and die.’

“‘I can do anything for you,’ I said to myself as I looked at her, ‘save let Ralph love you again.’

“Then I thought of his words, and the sick throb at his heart when I hinted she might be living, and I deemed it better to hide her lest she should kindle up the old flame again, and make me hate her as in the bitter days of our strife.

"Jealousy is a consuming fire, in whose light shadows grow to giants. And yet in the morning sun I saw the change sin and suffering had wrought in her. It was not only that she was blind, and haggard, and worn, but the crouching gait, the something terrible in her attitude which I had marked from the first, now struck me with a strange shiver, for I saw it arose from some injury or fall she had received.

" 'How did it happen?' said I, softly.

" 'I was escaping, and in my blindness fell from a great height. They took me up crushed, broken out of all humanity, and I lay for months in one of their haunts, scarcely sensible, I think. When I recovered I was as you see me now.'

" 'And your poor eyes?' said I.

" 'I think I wept them away. I can scarcely tell when I first found them growing dim. I think it was after my little boy was born that gradually a film came over them which blinded me.'

" 'And where is your child?' How the word choked me, knowing its father was a robber and its mother not a wife.

" 'I can't tell—no, I can't tell even you,' answered Alicia, wildly. 'They ceased to watch me; they thought the blind cripple had no hope of deliverance; they forgot that I was a mother. I saved my boy, not myself; I could not let him be a thief, Mildred.'

"But at this point Alicia grew incoherent, then silent and apathetic, and I saw with new anguish that her mind was shaken, or, rather, dulled, crushed down and content now to remain inactive. Thus it was,

with many questions and much pain, I dragged from her the history of her life. She did not care to tell it; she seemed to care for nothing. Such she was on the day after she came to me—such she is now, with apparently no desire for aught on earth. She never laughs, and seldom speaks save when I or Martha force her; and then, though a moment before a looker-on might deem her mind quite gone, she answers with such sense and reason that I often fancy it is only the will, the power to act, which lies maimed and injured within her brain, while thought remains untouched and clear.*

“In brief narrative this is her story:—She had met in Paris a young man, gay and handsome, who pleased her. She scarcely knew if she loved him, but she listened to him there, and listened still more when he followed her to London. But here she met Ralph, to whom she was at first attracted by his turn of feature, his tone of voice somewhat resembling her unknown and mysterious lover. No thought of supplanting me had then entered her heart. Ralph talked of me often, but harshly, unkindly, and she thought he did not love

* NOTE BY ESTHER.—In the cerebellum, or supplementary brain, resides exclusively a property which consists in the power of *co-ordinating the movements* willed by the cerebrum, or greater brain; hence, if the cerebellum were slightly diseased, a person in perfect reason would find it difficult to use any exertion or form of locomotion. Silence, apathy, inertness would be the characteristics of his state. This would account for the submission and indifference with which the unfortunate mother of Hubert bore her long imprisonment and concealment. Doubtless her great desire to save her child and to reach Treval gave her brain power over the inert cerebellum for a time, but, these things accomplished, it sank at once into inactivity.

me. She chatted, she sang, she coquetted, she never dreamed of taking his heart away; but at length letters from home, speaking of him as my affianced husband, awoke her to the truth. She spoke to him of me; he answered madly with wild words of love for her. She broke away from him, and in her own room, on the table, she found a letter from the lover to whose vows she had listened a few short weeks ago. She dared not ask herself whom she loved of these two; something whispered it was Ralph, her sister's lover, but she would not hear the voice. She wrote to the address given her, and recklessly agreed to a meeting.

"When they met she contrasted him with Ralph, and although he seemed gayer, wittier, handsomer, yet there was something wanting in his bearing and manners which Ralph had, and which gave Ralph the advantage. Still she was not ill-pleased to hear there was a chance of her seeing him at Bath, whither she was going.

"Alicia was very young; if she were a coquette, if the power of her beauty, and the delight she felt in pleasing and being pleased, caused her to err, I, remembering her sufferings, will not dare to pass judgment on her.

"The stranger, whose air of romance and mystery charmed her, came not to Bath; but Ralph followed her thither in hot haste and passion. Then Alicia resolved to come home: not that she was frightened; she was too gay, too inexperienced, too ignorant of the depths in the heart to feel fear. The young think they may cross a torrent, edge a precipice, or play with fire,

and not be hurt. O, the sorrow caused by the foolish, who mean no harm ! As a child sets a curtain idly in a blaze, not foreseeing the end of his work, so had she created in the hearts of two—nay, of three—men a flame that was to devour their lives, their honour, their happiness.

“ Her presence at Treganowen was the beginning of strife and sorrow too bitter for me to touch on. With her gay nature—kindly, thoughtless, soft—she could not understand Admonitia's and my grave ways and speech. We spoke harshly, I own it, when we should have soothed this poor young creature, whose imprudence had already fastened a deadly coil around her. She came to Treganowen meaning to tell us all, but our ways were not her ways, and she was frozen into silence. Hatred, enmity, made a breach between us, which bitter words widened every day. At times she thought she would marry Ralph, and she looked hourly for him to ask her ; and wondered why he had not courage to break with me. Then her father took up her cause ; and seeing Ralph's heart gone from me, he thought it useless to kick against the pricks, but straightway went to the admiral and proposed that Alicia should be his son's bride. To the surprise of all, Ralph refused ; then Alicia felt a strange emptiness come over her heart, and for the first time she began to pity me. She watched me ; she saw my grief, and all the hidden humiliation of soul with which I prepared for a marriage on which Ralph insisted, longing in his hate and agony to consummate his misery and mine. Then seeing that he could neither

persuade himself to love me nor to forsake me, a revulsion of feeling came to her ; she called him coward in her heart, and began to hate him. While in this mood, her old lover suddenly presented himself as she walked by the rocks near Trevalla. *He* was not half hers, half another's, like Ralph ; his heart was hers, passionately, devotedly, entirely ; so impatient of sorrow as her spirit was, it was natural she should turn to *him* for happiness, thinking thus to escape from the gloom and strife of Treval. Perhaps, deep down in her heart there lay some thought of vexing Ralph by this hasty marriage, and forcing him to repent that he had chosen honour before love.

“ But when she would have brought her lover to Treval, when she bade him ask her of her father, he refused, and left her abruptly. Days passed by without bringing him to their trysting-place, and now that uncertainty and grief came between them, and the thought arose that she should lose him for ever, she sounded her poor untried heart, and, lo ! it answered her that it was he whom she had loved from the first, and not Ralph. Me she had injured too deeply to be confidential with, but she flung herself in Admonitia's way and tried to speak. She was answered with scorn and withering contempt, and she fled from Admonitia's bitter words to her room, and thence, in her restless fever, she stole out in the still night to the lawn ; and there, beneath the cedar-tree, watching the windows of Treval, she found her lover. He seized her hand, he implored her to hear him, he poured out his heart to her, confessing that he was the son of a poor girl whose

lover had deserted her; he had no father, no name; he reviled himself that he had ever dared to address her; he bade her farewell. Then he fled from her like a madman ere she could utter a word.

"Alicia loved excitement—mystery—concealment. Life for her took the shape of a drama, restless with intrigue, plot, and passion, of which she must always be the heroine. She was not ill-pleased, then, at this new phase of affairs, for she thought the next scene would bring her lover to her feet again. But he came not, and Ralph, too, avoided her, and a *real* gloom began to settle on her spirit. In very truth the atmosphere of Treval, laden with strife, jealousy, and hate, was too heavy for any human soul to bear, and hers, now flinching from its pain, took a deadly swerve from the right path. Fearing all the hate and anguish she had caused, and fleeing from it; believing in her blind pain that she was doing well to escape the sight of my pale misery, and that it was a generous deed thus to crush Ralph's love for ever, she wrote to her unknown lover and offered to fly with him. To her dramatic nature the scheme looked fair and charming, even noble; she should relieve my jealous heart from all its fears; she should release Admonitia from the weight of her presence at Treval; and as for herself, her father would forgive her, and all would be well. Thus deceiving herself, she drew so happy a future that she grew to think a deadly sin a holy duty.

"For many days she found no reply to her letter in the old worn windlass of the Wishing-well—their agreed place of concealment—and during this sus-

pense she stood one morning—it was the 13th of that dreadful November—in the dining-room window working with some bright silks at a purse. She hung a skein of these to the shutter, and untangling it thus she drew the shutter open, then leaning over into the darkness below she dropped the purse and needles. Lighting a taper, she descended the steps and fetched them, then glancing round the place it struck her as strange and curious, and gathering up her dress from the cobwebs, she explored it cautiously. There was no mystery, seemingly, in the broken piles of steps that mounted to the dark roof, and led apparently only to a decayed rack stretched across the dingy ceiling, but as Alicia reached the upper steps a quivering beam of light fell over her from an archway like a bin at the top. Leaning forward into this, her heart beat as she saw the light came from an opening in the wall of this arch. A moment's search convinced her the whitewash—blackened now—covered not stone, but wood; with all her strength she pushed against it, and a door, dust-laden and hard to move, opened slowly inwards.

“The old legend of Treval referring to a hidden room recurred to her memory, and she instantly concluded that this was the entrance to it. In days of danger, this vaulted entry was doubtless filled with wine, and baffled searchers. Excited by her discovery, Alicia sprang within the door, and found herself in a narrow passage winding itself upwards by a succession of steps. Hung with cobwebs and laden with dust, still the place was not gloomy, for many a cherub's

wing, or sculptured shield, or carved imp had served the architect to hide the opening by which he admitted light and air to this secret staircase that climbed the western front. Continuing the ascent, Alicia reached a door with handle and lock as little mysterious as any she had ever turned. It yielded quietly to her hand, and she then found herself in a small unfinished chamber lighted by a window in the roof. The door she held was in a niche; it was masked by a row of shelves, on which lay a few dusty books and papers.* A minute sufficed to show Alicia that she must return by the way she came, or pass over nearly the whole of the roof. Her taper was nearly burnt out, and the roof was dark, so she chose the latter route, and passing within the door it swung to noiselessly, but securely. Retracing her steps with more leisure and less excitement, she observed another passage branching to the left; it brought her to another door, and on opening this she found herself in a long, low chamber, evidently the spot of the legend, the secret room of Treval. The window came to the floor, but reached only to about three feet in height, and a black board nailed across the lower part stole much of the light, and rendered the place gloomy. It possessed two doors, the one by which she had entered and another near the window. It was on opening this that her heart for the first time beat with terror, for she found

* NOTE BY ESTHER.—Doubtless it was the closing of this door by Alicia, when she escaped me on the roof, which blew the papers from their resting-place, and sent them rustling down the dark arched passage to meet me.

herself in my chamber, and at two steps from her she heard my voice and Admonitia's in our sitting-room.

"Alas! disunion is weakness and sin! Had we been friends she would have run to us and shown us her discovery, but enemies as we were she was only startled by our voices, and she stepped back hastily into the secret room and closed the door. A few minutes more and she was back in the dining-room brushing the cobwebs from her dress, and applauding herself with pride for her courage. Then she stepped out on the lawn, and tried to find the window of the hidden room. Apparently there was none, for she knew every room on the western front, and counted to each its window without finding the one for which she sought. Of one thing she was certain, that it was close to mine; but she long scanned the front with searching eyes ere her mind seized upon the truth. The hidden room lay between the ceiling of the library and the floor of my sitting-room, and it was lighted by the uppermost part of the long Gothic window in the library.

"Quick as lightning Alicia ran to convince herself of this, but on entering the room her belief for a moment was shaken; the carved ceiling appeared so lofty, and the window was so skilfully finished within, that no one would have guessed this arched top was not its true termination. But a visit to the drawing-room, whose height she now scanned with a discerning eye, convinced her she was right.*

* In my search for the window I was only led once to think



“Not knowing whether my father would wish to have the discovery of this hidden chamber, and its communication with the roof and cellar beneath the dining-room, divulged to the servants, Alicia waited his return from his ride without speaking to any one, and wearying of the time she went to the old well to search for letters. There, leaning moodily against a tree, she found her lover. He caught her in his arms wildly, he prayed her to forgive him, and he gave her up for ever! But suddenly, while she was weeping on his shoulder, a man came forward from the trees and beckoned to him. He obeyed the signal, and after conversing with him for a few minutes he returned to Alicia, and now with a strange change of mood he accepted her mad proposition with fierce joy, and implored her to quit Treval with him at once. But Alicia's heart sank at the near prospect of leaving her home, and, hurrying speech upon speech, she talked of other things, and told her lover of her strange discovery in old Treval that day. He listened with eager interest, and implored her as a favour to tell no one, not even her father.

“Why should I lengthen this account? Alicia obeyed him, and the night before my wedding-day she unbarred the dining-room shutter and admitted her lover to Treval. In the confusion of her unformed, inexperienced thought, she deemed she was doing a good deed, and doing it for my sake, who hated her.

of the library, but on entering, and observing the Gothic point reaching to the ceiling, I gave up the idea as altogether wrong.
—ESTHER TREGANOWEN.

She came to my room by the secret way and bade me be happy, and I believe, had I spoken one kind word to her, she would have flung herself on my neck and implored me to save her; but, proud and jealous, I was silent. So this poor girl, not much loving Ralph, not much loving this other hero of her romance, went on her way, and brought anguish and destruction on herself and on us. She came to me in the dead of night, in darkness, and I never heeded how she came, nor how she went. Little thinking what her visit really meant, I only looked on it as a proof of the swelling hatred in her heart against me for Ralph's sake, and I sank to sleep with tears because my wedding-day was so bitter to me.

"When Alicia left my room, she found her lover in the secret chamber awaiting her, and she would have been alarmed to see another man with him, but with his arm around her he whispered—

" 'Never fear, 'tis only a friend of mine.'

"There was no time for further words; he bore her away, and in her agitation she never remarked that his companion remained at Treval. Half carrying, half leading his prey, he took her across the fields to a secluded lane, where a carriage and two saddle-horses awaited them. There was a sick terror in Alicia's heart which kept her silent as her lover placed her within the carriage, and, in spite of his soothing words, this increased tenfold as she witnessed his agitation, and discovered that he was waiting for his companion. An hour passed, and then not one man, but four, crept silently over the tall hedge and jumped into the lane.

"'What have you been doing?' whispered Alicia's lover, fiercely. 'Villains! you have broken faith with me; you have robbed Treval!'

"He seized his burly companion by the throat, and there would have been a deadly quarrel but for the other men, who separated them with oaths, and insisted on their thinking on flight and safety.

"Too late, the wretched Alicia saw in whose hands she was. She would have escaped, she would have rushed back to Treval, but to attempt it was useless, and she was driven away a prisoner. Her sole consolation was in seeing a kind of nobleness in her lover, who would have borne her back to her father's house had he not have been wounded and overpowered, and made a prisoner like herself.


"She knew not where they hid that night; for days she knew nothing but anguish and fever. At length they put to sea, landing at night on a desolate beach, somewhere, she thought, near the Lizard. There are many caves here, and in one of these she, still a prisoner, found her lover wounded and feeble. In tending him, in hearing his sad story, in nursing him back to life, Alicia learned to love him with all her heart. From a little child of tender years he had known no companions but thieves; he could remember no father, no mother. He was very young, and until he loved her, he had never, in the mad thoughtlessness of his career, grieved much at his life as a highwayman. Now it was different, and his heart was set on redeeming his life.

"In the cave with Alicia was a young Welsh girl, the mistress or the wife of the burly ruffian whom

they all obeyed. She was very pretty, very delicate, and fair. The Welsh and Cornish being of the same race, are like each other, and there was a certain resemblance between Alicia and Phoebe which was noticeable at the first glance. As the terrible days went on, Alicia saw with horror, that the villain whose prisoner she was, wished her lover to treat her as on a level with this girl.

“‘There is no marrying among us,’ he said to her coarsely. ‘You must have a gipsy wedding when your bridegroom is well enough.’

“She bore this patiently, because her lover’s respect consoled her. Maddened by her grief, he planned an escape, but in the very act of flight they were intercepted, and the poor Welsh girl who was aiding them, was struck down dead by the man who called himself her husband. The blow was given in sudden passion, and the ruffian repented of it bitterly. Alicia took advantage of his remorse to send me back my jewels. She did not know the ‘poor murdered girl’s chance likeness to her was so adroitly taken advantage of to stop further pursuit for herself. Before the corpse was laid at our door, she was placed on board ship, and in a day or two they sailed for Ireland. Alicia was lodged in a wretched cabin, where situated she knew not. And here her lover, who had all along urged her escape, and, if possible, return home, confessed in despair the scheme was no longer practicable. She, too, thinking of her sister’s hatred, could only believe she would be spurned from the doors of Treval as a dishonoured outcast. For three months she had been



in this dread society. Who would credit the story of her innocence now? What other hope on earth had she, save to be the wife of this young man, whom she loved, stripped, though he was, of every veil romance and mystery had thrown around him?

"They were married, but with such precaution and secrecy, that my unhappy sister could give me no details which might help me to prove the fact. Remembering the assertions in the letters sent to me, I doubted if there were even a real marriage, but I dared not torture Alicia with surmises.

"She was not left in peace to enjoy what poor comfort she could have with her husband. The young man, she said, had a noble nature, but fiery, impetuous, and his mind untutored, he was easily worked on to a jealousy that became a madness. Even her accomplishments and grace added to this, as they made him feel more deeply the difference in their position and education.

"There is no need to relate the tale that separated Alicia from her husband. Enough that a few months after her marriage she found herself denounced as faithless, while her husband rendered all explanation impossible, and wrecked his and her happiness for ever, by fleeing to some foreign land, none knew whither. Thus deserted, she succumbed to her anguish, nor rallied till her child was born; then for his sake she roused herself, and concentrated her whole thought on means of escape. Still her boy was nearly two years old before she succeeded. And evidently about this time, from grief and fear, and the

injury she had sustained in her fall, her brain was clouded, for she does not know with whom or in what place she left her child. Or perhaps some motherly instinct warns her not to divulge to me where her son has found safety.

"This was Alicia's narrative. I relate it coloured by her own feelings, which throw a halo of romance round a ruffian, and paint a thief with honour and love. I listened to her tale like one in the delirium of fever, and having hidden her all the day in the secret room, I fetched Admonitia at nightfall, and poured out the history to her in rapid words. Then not giving her time to answer, I brought her into Alicia's presence. But, as I had feared, Admonitia, after one look, denounced her as an impostor, and implored me not to heed the falsehoods of an abandoned woman, who sought safety and shelter at Treval, either from her accomplices or her crimes. Thus by my tacit recognition of Phoebe Linton as my sister, I had destroyed all chance of Alicia being acknowledged by her family. I would have appealed to my father, but for the first and only time in her life Admonitia set her will firmly against mine.

"She would not have, she said, the last days of an old man disturbed by a lying tale like this. She would not kill him outright by bringing this poor, broken, wretched creature before him as his daughter. Was her father to be murdered for the sake of a wandering beggar-woman who owned that she had come from a den of thieves?

"Then I worked upon Admonitia's pride. If this un-

happy woman were not Alicia, at least she knew all Alicia's history, and she called herself by Alicia's name; should we send her to the workhouse to tell her tale there, or should we let her die in a ditch? And so I gained permission for the poor outcast to remain concealed at Treval.


"Broken-hearted I saw Ralph that day, and hid from him as I could my misery. For his sake I had virtually killed and buried Alicia when I held my peace at Phœbe Linton's funeral, and thinking of this, and bearing in my heart the crushed and weeping woman once so beautiful, now bruised and blind, wounded and broken, and the root of all her pain lying in our unsisterly strife and his fickle passion, I shrank from him that day, treating him with a strange coldness, till at last he quitted me angrily.

"I think I should have won Admonitia into belief; I think I should have brought the poor wanderer to her father, and trusted to his heart to recognise her; but two days after she came to Treval, I met Paul Polwhele, and I learnt that Alicia's husband, Alicia's child, were the heirs to Treganowen!

"I bow my head in grief and pain unutterable as I make the confession; but from that day I asked myself of what use freedom would be to this poor blind woman, and whether it would not be happier for her to hide her sorrows and her story in sure concealment at Treval? The secret room would render this easy, but at the same time, I did not deceive myself as to the martyrdom and anguish of the task; I knew I must give her my life—my whole life. I antici-

pated no difficulty from her ; she was meekly thankful to be here ; she shrank from all contact with the world. All her desire was to hide ; imprisonment by cruel hands—perhaps death—awaited her without ; for her there were shelter and safety only at Treval.

“The first, the cruelest, blow in my martyrdom was to part with Ralph. The admiral had said, ‘Take my son, if no holier duty hold you back.’ The duty was here, and my way clear before me. For Ralph’s own sake I could not be his wife ; I knew he must marry Lucy, while I, who had borne so much for him, must learn to bear more, and endure in secrecy a shame, a pain, a grief, before which all my past anguish paled away. And there was no escape for me. I could do Alicia and young Treganowen no good now. Had I spoken when I met the robber at the Wishing-well he might have asserted his claims to birth and name, and he and Alicia might have been happy. Now that thought was hopeless, and only shame could come of my speaking. And what shame ! Was he not a thief, and had he not impudently said that Alicia was no wife ? Should I give Treganowen to such a man ? Should I destroy Ralph for him ? And my father, so weary of sorrow, so broken in health, could I dare crush him with this tale ?—could I dare search out and bring home to him such a grandson ? Ah no ; I could not do it ; so I took upon myself the sin of breaking the admiral’s trust. I bore the burden and sorrow of keeping Alicia at Treval in secrecy, while Admonitia only chafed, and my father drew peacefully towards his grave, and Ralph



went on his way unconsciously deeming himself aggrieved.

"Oh! pardon me, ye who judge! I knew his character well. If he had to give up Treganowen—his old ancestral place—to this felon's child he would die. And the boy was Alicia's son! I shrank at that thought; remembering his love for her, his horror and loathing of her destroyer, I could feel the additional gall and bitterness that would fill his soul.

"‘Let these be mine instead,’ I said, as I bowed my head and wept. ‘I have sinned once for him; it is not so hard to sin again.’

"Nor was this all. If I wished him to have Treganowen I must wed him to Lucy—a compact at which Paul had hinted—I must see another take my place by his side, while I in the solitude of Treval kept watch over the dead.

"Yet a little while I evaded my fate; I knew I must bid him farewell, but I lingered; I waited three, six, eight days before I spoke—

"‘Ralph, I cannot be your wife.’

"Not calmly did he bear these words. His indignation burst upon me in a storm of fury. He called me unforgiving, implacable, and vindictive. Above all, he accused me of *not loving him*, of never having loved him; and, cruelest of all, he laid upon me the sin of his change, and mad passion for Alicia.

"I should not have shut myself up in my gloom, he said, morbidly accusing myself, and refusing to see him. That caused it all. Naturally he fled from me

to gayer scenes. He was young. Alicia was beautiful, and a coquette. All men would have done what he did—they would have fallen madly in love with her. Men had such follies; they meant nothing—they were nothing. I ought never to have heeded the matter, much less have quarrelled about it. Had I loved him I should have borne with him better, and been gentle to Alicia for his sake; but I was heartless, cruel, a woman of stone.

“Good Heavens! was he a toy to be taken up and flung down at the whim of a girl? What was my love worth, since there was no pardon, no pity, no warmth in it? On what plea was I going a second time to make him an exile, and reject an affection that had withstood such shocks of time and grief? Was it because in the madness of his love for Alicia he had persecuted me? He had not thought I was so unforgiving, so wanting in sense; he was not accountable for his actions at that time. I ought to pity him. I should learn to make allowances, and not nurse anger for a youthful folly and involuntary change, that in very truth had never injured either me or Alicia.

“In amazement I asked him to what he ascribed Alicia's departure with the robbers?

“He *laughed* as he answered, saying it was like a woman's logic to suppose any connection between a band of burglars suddenly entering Treval and his affection for either Alicia or myself. By what reasoning did I make one grow out of the other? Did I wish to make him responsible for the heinous crime of these

men? If he had never spoken to my sister, would she not have been forcibly carried away and murdered all the same?

"I broke from him. I ran to my own room; I drew aside the steps, and looked in upon the patient prisoner, who smiled upon me in her blindness, and welcomed me with a kiss.

"Here was the fruit of his love—the folly, the nothing, which I ought never to have heeded. We two were shut up for ever—prisoner and gaoler—whose task was the harder, whose fate the more cruel?

"It was in looking upon Alicia with the echo of his words ringing in my ears, that my soul first imperatively demanded some suffering for *him*, in return for all her miseries and mine. And let psychologists explain the mystery if they can, but the more I loved him the more I sinned for him; the more earnest and cruel my endeavours to keep Treganowen for him, the more resolute and eager became my desire for revenge. Let him suffer something that would teach him the truth—something that would show him what grew out of such 'follies'—that was all I asked. I was sinning so deeply for him day by day, I was watching Alicia grow so woful and weary in her prison, that my breaking heart cried to me for this relief, and I could only quiet it by saying, 'I mean to grieve him—I mean to repay him some of this bitterness!' Without this I must have gone mad—I must have braved all consequences, and proclaimed aloud the presence and existence of Alicia and her son.

"It was from this strange craving of mine to avenge upon him all the sufferings that for his sake I heaped upon her, that sprang my scheme to separate Esther and Alice, and show him in the hearts of his children some of the anguish of mine.

"He thought so much of coming back to me. Alas! what was that worth to me? Did it restore the spirit of sisterhood and love to us?—would it give sight to the blind, or heal the broken-hearted?—did it wipe out disgrace, or turn dishonour into honour?—could it undo all that his leaving me had done? No, never! His desertion took my sister from me, young, beautiful, and good—his return brought her again, blind, broken, and a prisoner. And to the world she was dead—it gave her a place no more—and even her father and her sister would turn from her as a thief and an impostor. And I, who, he said, did not love him—I, who alone could prove that she was truly Alicia Tremaine—I meant for his sake to hold my peace—that he might be rich and untroubled, I meant to keep her here in secrecy, a lonely prisoner till death. To prove her identity, her marriage, the birth of her son, I must arrest Paul and ruin Ralph. No! rather let the murderer go free, and let the innocent remain in captivity! Farewell all hopes of peace!—my resolve is made!

"He left England for India—he left thinking me unloving, hard, unforgiving—he thinks me so still. I, who that day had borne for his sake to hear Paul Polwhele call me 'accomplice.'

"When he was gone—when I knew that it was

only in old age and grey hairs that we could meet again—when I had looked on the face I loved so well, and noted every youthful line and beauty for the last time—then I sank down in despair.

“Admonitia, whose heart yearned over me, would have raised me, but I broke from her and ran to Alicia, not for comfort, but to comfort her. I tried by a thousand kindnesses to quiet my conscience. I brought old Martha to her, trusting her with the secret, and hoping she would recognise the truth. But no! Martha disbelieved, and gave all her pity to me. Oh, how they have made my soul writhe when they have called me martyr and her impostor! Oh, have mercy on me! have mercy on me? Will no one believe this is my sister unless I prove it by destroying Ralph?

“If Martha, even, would believe, it would soothe me, it would soothe *her*. She is weary of disbelief—she sinks beneath it—but for me she would die. My belief, my love, sustain her—the love of her cruelest enemy. When she clings to me, and says, ‘Mildred, my poor Mildred—my comforter—the only one who would succour me, who would take me to her heart and call me sister,’ I long to shriek aloud the truth with a thousand tongues. At such times there is a craving in my spirit like a fire to do some wrong to Ralph—to avenge upon him the wrong I do to her.

“I am not learned. I cannot search out the hidden things of the spirit. I only know that although I love him with such long-suffering, painful love, yet this

desire is become a hunger of the heart with me which will be satisfied.

"Ralph married, and Esther came to me; but I need not speak of this, nor tell how often Paul's story changed, and he claimed the name of Treganowen no longer for himself, but for his brother. Robbers have many *aliases*; so, although Alicia calls her husband 'Alan,' I still know not how far this corroborates his tale—I cannot say whether Paul or Alan be her husband. To me these two brothers—if there be two—are alike terrible.

"Her imprisonment here maddens me. My lonely walks with her upon the leads at night—where alone she can get air—make me feel like a ghoul wandering with the dead. I invent a thousand things to amuse, to soothe her—she answers me by asking for her son! I look at her with tears, and I keep my reason, although there is an unspoken compact between me and Paul that this son is *never to be found*. I tremble when I think the boy is in this man's power—perhaps a thief like him.

"Oh! is there nothing, nothing I can do for Alicia, without ruining Ralph, save be her gaoler?

"Sometimes, weeping, I cling to old Martha, and implore her to believe that this poor, patient, blind prisoner is my sister—but she answers me—

"'Miss Alicia lies in Trevalla Church. Oh, Miss Mildred, what a martyr you are to this poor demented creature!'

"And yet Martha is kind to her, and every fancy a sickly taste can crave is gratified. The little

kitchen I have had fitted up within my room has hitherto sufficed all wants, and our secret has never oozed beyond my apartments.

"Thinking Esther might be the victim of my morbid desire for revenge, I tried not to like her; but when she came to me in strange sickness, with all that cold, hard, repelling time of her first sojourn at Treval swept from her mind, and full of the genius and power given her by her mysterious disease, she lavished love upon me warm and bright as her own rare nature; when, like one supernaturally gifted, she understood without a word all my suffering and my love, and wept for me and with me, I could no longer keep my full heart from going forth to her like a mother's. Above all, I loved her because she believed Alicia. Endowed mysteriously with rare gifts and powers of discernment, I had no need to say 'This is my sister.' She knew it of herself, even as she had known her own sister, when, as a last experiment to save her life, her father had brought Alice to her bedside at Clifton, Esther's gifts during this period of her life were mystic, spiritual, incomprehensible. Of one thing I am sure: she gave Alicia *news of her son*.

" 'When Esther is with me,' said Alicia, 'I feel as though my son were brought nearer to me. It may be a sickly woman's fancy, Mildred, but she seems to me the link, the chain, that will draw him back to my side.'

" Esther's tenderness, Esther's songs, broke her from her silence and apathy, and brought back to her so much of her old self, that Admonitia's disbelief was

shaken, and there were days, even weeks, when she was to her truly a sister.

"During this strange epoch in Esther's life I did not fear her as some did ; I conversed with her without reserve, I kept no secrets from her, and listened in wonder as this child, with her clear spirit-voice, warned me of sorrow and pain to come if I persisted in betraying the trust reposed in me by the admiral. She bade me love her father's honour above his life and land.

" 'This orphan whom you despoil will be found, and this murderer whom you have secretly protected so long will surely destroy you in the end, for Justice has a sure hand,' she said.

"Mr. Winterdale, my bitter enemy, the man who would hunt me even to death, saw Esther once or twice during her state of somnolency, and his interest took so curious a phase, he was so watchful and inquisitive, that I would not permit him to see her again. Not that I feared his eliciting anything from her ; her wisdom at this time was far beyond his, and she never once disobeyed my injunctions to secrecy. She knew I had brought her face to face with Alicia to cure the fever and frenzied terror brought on by a sight of her on the roof, and she would not betray me for doing her a kindness. I had saved her life and her reason ; she was grateful, and no word of my secret passed her lips, even to her father. I knew I could trust her ; she loved me then ; perhaps she hates me now, and suspects me, as Mr. Winterdale does—of murder !

"I write this confession for her, and not because I fear Mr. Winterdale's threats, or have any presentiment of danger to myself from him ; but lately he has begun to threaten me *through* her, and I cannot bear to fear injury from her hand. If ever he should strive to make a weapon of her to strike at my life and honour, I will give her this paper, and say simply—

" ' Esther, pity me ! ' "

" MILDRED SALOME TREMAINE.

" Written immediately after my interview with Esther, on the road between Treganowen and Treval September, 1805. " M. S. T."

THE NARRATIVE OF PAUL POLWHELE.

WRITTEN BY HIM FOR HIS NIECE ESTHER.

" You have heard of my mother Barbara. She was only sixteen when she left her brother's roof ; she was seventeen when she found herself defenceless and forsaken, thrust out with her infant upon the wide world. The man who deserted her left money behind him, but she was too young to know how to spend it or how to keep it ; and to make it go the faster, she was robbed by the people with whom she lodged. She soon found herself penniless, and she sank from place to place, from misery to misery. There's no need to tell it all in long sentences. Enough that she went back at last to the people with whom she first lodged, and asked

for help, and for reasons of their own they gave it. By their aid she gained a situation as assistant in a shop. She gained it by denying her motherhood, and hiding her child—myself—with these people. All her little salary went to them, and in return they ill-used and neglected me. They were receivers of stolen goods; by much cunning outwardly respectable, but inwardly ravening wolves. I grew up in an atmosphere of which you, Esther, know nothing. I associated with thieves and vagabonds. I early learnt to deceive my mother, who was simple-minded and weak, and too much in the power of these miscreants to dare remove me from their roof. A word from them would destroy her, and thrust her again on the world homeless. So year after year went on; and ignorant in a great degree of the truth, seeing me only on her rare holidays, she made no effort to break her bonds. Thus I went on thieving expeditions, and gloried in my success, while she still thought me an innocent child. At last I fell into prison; and then, when I saw my mother's agony, I awoke in some degree from my blindness; but only partially, for I *wondered* at her grief rather than sorrowed at it. And I soon forgot it; for on being set free I ran away with a gang friendly to me, and for two years I travelled from prison to prison through different counties. During this time I thought little of my mother, but on returning to London, I sent a message, begging her to come and see me. I found she had gained a better place, and she was now forewoman in a large establishment where she was trusted and respected.

"She was only now thirty-one or two, and it is the privilege of beauty to retain youth longer than homeliness can hope to keep it. Her beauty struck me as she entered the room where I awaited her, and her joyful aspect struck me still more.

"I did not tell her where I had been, what I had suffered, or what I had done. I waited sullenly for her to speak.

"'Paul!' she cried, 'why have you left me so long? you must try to be a gentleman; you must go to school——'

"'What is the matter now?' I asked.

"'He has come back to me—he has asked me to be his wife? and she burst into tears.

"I could not comprehend her at first, when I did, I swore with a fearful oath that she was lying, and that the scoundrel, my father, should never speak to her again.

"In incoherent words she related how the gentleman—whose name, if she knew it, she did not divulge to me—had been engaged twice to ladies of his own rank, who had both died in some strange sudden way, and, struck with superstitious remorse, he had sought out the little Barbara he had once loved. He had sought her, meaning to satisfy his conscience by placing her in comfort and competence; but he found her honoured, beloved, and beautiful. He lingered near her; he came again and again, and at length he offered her his hand. During this time she had feared to speak to him of me. She did not know where I was, and she dreaded to hear I was again in prison. I per-

ceived by her manner that the fine gentleman who had come back to her had no great wish to see me or to own me. If I were lost in the great world or dead, he would marry with a happier mind. Sullen, proud, and full of bitterness, I waylaid his path next day to look upon his face. He got down at my mother's door and ordered me to hold his horse. I refused, and he struck me cruelly with his whip. I cursed him, and told him who I was. His face turned deadly pale, but he left me without a word. It was more than an hour—an hour that was a year of sullen pain to me—before he quitted the house; then I made my way to my mother's presence.

“She was weeping bitterly. It was long before I got her to tell me the truth. I tore it from her, as it were, bit by bit. The fine gentleman was shocked; his son was a coarse, foul, miserable vagrant and thief, and the fact astonished and disgusted him. True, there was a comfort in knowing he was a son of no account—a creature the law did not acknowledge, and he would only marry my mother now on condition that she never asked him to see this wretched boy. It would do him no good to own him—he was past that; and nothing could ever give him legal rights. He would apprentice him to some trade—tailor, shoemaker, carpenter, what he liked; and it would be his own fault then if he did not turn out honest. She had always called herself Miss Treloar: she could be married under that name, and her relationship to this young thief could be hidden from the world for ever.

"From the wistful glance of my mother's eye, and the way she hid her face from me, I saw she had consented to this cruelty. All that was good in me broke down then, yet I made one effort.

" 'Mother,' I said, 'consent to quit this man for ever, and I will turn honest. I am only thirteen, but I have the height and strength of seventeen—I will maintain you.'

"She shook her head. She did not believe me, or she loved that man too well to leave him.

"I ran away that night, sending my mother a farewell scrawl, bidding her tell her betrothed that I was as good as dead to her, but alive to him for vengeance, and I scorned him too much to accept anything at his hands.

"My letter was ill spelt, ill written, and dirty ; doubtless, to all refined eyes, thief and vagabond were stamped on it legibly, but it was not all bad.

"Next time my father saw me I was standing at the bar of the Old Bailey, to be tried for highway robbery. The court was crowded, and I did not see him ; but that evening, after my acquittal—for the trial was cleverly managed by my friends—I received a purse of money and a letter from my mother. She was married, she said, but so great was her husband's dread of being disgraced through me, that he had not made his marriage public, and would not, at all events, till his aged father was dead.

"This story seemed to me so like a fabrication that I hated the coward gentleman more than ever. I wrote her a harsh letter, laying all the burden of my sins at

her door, and I sent my curse to the man who had led her into misery a second time.

"After this I led a wild life on the eastern coast among the smugglers. I made money, I lingered some time abroad, and picked up some education. In this way four years passed—in the whole six, since my mother's pretended marriage, as I thought it—when, on entering a pretty country house on the Devonshire coast, hawking French lace and silks smuggled, I was ushered into the presence of—my mother! Her terror on recognising me I have never forgotten. A beautiful child played by her side; he was her idol; he was heir to great estates, to an ancient name, to honour, respect, love—in fact to all that, as his elder brother, should have been mine.

"As my mother told me all this, she implored me for *his* sake to lose myself again among the army of vagabonds to which I belonged, and let my birth and my existence be forgotten for ever. She pressed money upon me, but I saw it was offered in fear, not love. I demanded proof of her marriage. She answered, the whole world would know it soon, for her husband was gone to the death-bed of his father. Then she wept as she talked of visiting in triumph the dear brother from whom she had been separated so long. One terrible shadow alone threatened to mar all her joy—myself. From all thought of me she shrank visibly; and I writhed in the pain of my proud heart as I saw how ease, comfort, and new affections had crushed out all her love for me.

"I hated the baby-brother for whose sake she wished

me to live an outcast, utterly forsaken and unacknowledged, my existence denied, my death daily longed for.

"I left the house in bitterness—I rejoined my companions—I drank hard, and that evening in the dusk I stole my brother, and at night we put to sea.

"‘Let all things be fair,’ I said to myself. ‘Brothers should be equals ; we are of the same blood, born of the same father and mother ; let both be gentlemen or let both be thieves.’”

"Putting this sentiment into coarse language strong as death and fire, I sent it to my father, and asked him if its logic pleased him.

"I took my brother abroad ; he had the same associates that I had, but he never endured the miseries, the ignorance of my childhood. I had him educated, for I never lost sight of the fact that he was heir to estates and honours which were mine by right of blood and eldership ; and in all the bitter hatred that I poured upon him, I still thought that after I was dead he or his children might enjoy them.

"Five years more and I found myself again off the Devonshire coast. My brother, now about ten years old, was with me, so were many of our band. Smuggling was a good trade in those days, but we had had a run of bad luck, and were consequently in an ill humour. One pitch dark night I and two or three others were rowing sullenly across the Sound towards our craft, lying a mile or two off shore, when we were hailed by a voice from a big ship. Not knowing what fortune might bring us, we answered the hail, and, in

reply to questions, declared ourselves a shore-boat plying for hire. Upon this a gentleman richly dressed came on board of us, and ordered us in a thick voice to take him ashore. He had been drinking, and this, doubtless, was the cause of his imprudent act in taking a heavy purse from his pocket and letting the men hear the chink of gold. Apparently he was counting the sum in his possession, when, after a hurried whisper among us, the first oarsman rose and demanded his money. In an instant there was a scuffle, oaths, blows, then the gentleman was overboard, and we seemed to be alone in the dark sea, yet not alone, for a thousand witnesses of stars, rocks, waves, spoke against us, and a voice rang in our ears uttering the dread words—

“ ‘Whoso taketh man's life, by man's hand shall his life be taken.’

“Of all in that boat, every one has died a violent death ; I alone am left, and my day is near at hand. I feel the tokens drawing nearer hour by hour.

“We hurried away to our ship, and set sail immediately for another port ; and then hearing no inquiries for the murdered gentleman, I gained courage to pay a stealthy visit to that country house where I had seen my mother. She was still there, still living under a name that I knew to be false ; hence her marriage—if there was a marriage—remained unacknowledged.

“I found the loss of the little boy continued to be a wonder among the few cottagers near. Some supposed him to have been stolen by gipsies ; others argued that he had wandered to the beach and was drowned, and

his body lay jammed between the rocks. I perceived by this my father had kept silent respecting my agency in the matter, and pride and the fear of disgrace had stifled even love for his child.

"Hearing Mr. Weston was not at home, I made my way fearlessly to the house, and reached my mother's presence. She shrieked on seeing me, and rose hurriedly.

" 'My boy ! my child ! ' was all she could utter.

" 'He is going on in the same career as his brother,' I answered. 'Tell that man that his son and heir—if he be his heir—has associated daily with thieves, and was present the other day when we robbed a man and flung him into the sea. He has no spirit, though ; he fainted downright, the puny coward !'

"My mother sank into a chair and wrung her hands piteously. I approached her, though I saw her shudder in every limb ; and, leading her on by the hope of recovering her boy, I drew from her that Mr. Weston, as he called himself, had been in no haste to proclaim his marriage* with the daughter of a petty tradesman, the unmarried mother of a thief. But after the birth of his son he assured her he waited only for his father's death to do her justice. That event occurred just as he found *both* his sons were to be thieves. He searched feverishly for the child at first, now delaying the confession of his marriage till he should be recovered ; but when his search proved hopeless, and he knew his heir

* Marriages could be easily concealed, as at this period it was not necessary that they should be solemnized in a church.

was irrecoverably in the hands of robbers, the idea struck him of denying his marriage altogether.

"It was easy to do this to so simple a woman as my mother, especially as he had arranged his marriage with so much secrecy and skill that she knew neither the name of the clergyman nor the witnesses. At all events, he now hesitated and prevaricated, and at length told my mother he would never own her as his wife, or acknowledge the lost boy as his heir, if he were brought up under my auspices to be a robber and felon.

"Under this blow he had grown morose and miserly—as men do grow who have no children to save for—and she had learned to fear him too much to utter any strong remonstrance against her position.

"Thus things had continued till about a year ago, when, finding there was hope of my mother bringing him an heir, he had taken her to London, and married her at a dismal city church in his own name. The child had proved a daughter, now six months old. He had grown fond of it; and having recovered from his first gloom and disappointment, he had at last resolved on presenting his wife to his family, and he was now gone to meet his brother at Plymouth, whence he would go on to his mansion to prepare the servants for her arrival.

"My mother added that she firmly believed he had done all that money could do to destroy every proof of the first marriage.

"As she told me this with bitter tears and cries of anguish for her lost boy, the golden-haired darling

whose loss had swept all beauty from her face, a servant entered with letters and newspapers.

"He stared hard at his mistress in tears, and harder at the supposed hawker standing carelessly by his unopened pack; then he said, as his country mouth gaped with the news—

" 'I suppose, ma'am, you've heerd there's bin a dreadful murder at Plymouth. A rich Cornish gentleman, called Treganowen, has been robbed and murdered, and thrown into the sea. They've found his body off Bovisand.'

"My mother answered first by a vacant stare, then a loud scream; then suddenly a horrible fear passed over her face, and she waved the man from the room, motioning me to hand her the letters and papers. With trembling hand she opened the first, dated a week back, and showed me the signature:—

" 'Your affectionate husband,

" 'RALPH TREGANOWEN.'

" 'Paul!' she said in a frightful whisper, clutching me by the arm—'say! this is not the man you spoke of just now!—it is not your father whom you have helped to rob and murder! Oh, no! it cannot be true!'

"Then seizing the letter from my hand, she read it through as with some wild, frenzied hope, while I tore open the paper. There I saw the date, the circumstance, the dress described, and I no longer doubted the man I had helped to rob and drown was my father! The sole jewel we had taken from

him was a breastpin. I had it with me now. I drew it forth and placed it before her eyes.

" 'Was this his ?'

" A look of horror and recognition was her only answer.

" 'Calm yourself,' I said in a choking voice. 'Do you wish to hang your sons ? Remember they were *both* present at this man's death.'

" I took from her hand Mr. Treganowen's letter, and read these cruel words :—

" 'You urge me to seek your son : this young ruffian is nothing to me. I deny any relationship to him. No man is obliged to acknowledge such children. He has no claim on me, and whatever claim he may have had on you he has destroyed by his conduct. Trouble yourself no more about him ; let him live and die a felon as he is. Never speak of this young thief to me as *my* child. I have but one son, whom may God restore to us !'

" As I read this, a rush of blood like fire flooded my heart.

" 'How can you weep for such a coward ?' I said to my mother. 'He has treated you cruelly all your life long. Even to the last he has withheld from you the miserable right of calling yourself his wife.'

" I would have raised her from the ground, where she lay convulsed with grief, but she shrank from my touch.

" 'It will kill me,' she said slowly, 'this know-

ledge that it is *your* hand that has slain your father.'

"I hardened myself like molten iron against her pain.

" 'He has died too good a death,' I said. 'He cast a girl and her child upon the world victims of his passion and cruelty; by this act his son is a thief, yet he is without pity. Safe in his name, his position, his *honour*, he has no word to throw to his own flesh and blood, save the cruel wish that he may live and die a felon. Hear me! I wish that in that world to which he is gone, he may learn to know what it is to live a felon—to be acquainted with misery, imprisonment, and chains—to know hunger, ill-usage, and darkness—yes, and sickness, the festering heat and fever of a gaol—and, lastly, may his soul be taught what it is to die a felon's death! If God's angels teach him all this, then when we meet, I will call him "Father," and he will not be ashamed to answer, "Son."'

"I need recount no more, Esther, of what followed. Suffice it to say that, her natural weakness still more enfeebled by a frenzied fear and grief, my mother yielded implicit submission to my advice. She affirmed that Mr. Weston had died suddenly; she sold off her furniture, she discharged her servants, and seeing that to proclaim her marriage would bring a murderer's death on her son, she renounced all hope of gaining her rightful position.

"I took her to the eastern coast of England, but her feeble health was unable to sustain this last shock.

She died in a few weeks, although I brought to her bedside the darling son for whom she had pined so long. Mr. Treganowen left no will, and I made no claim on his family for either my brother or sister. Fear for my own safety forbade any attempt of the kind. And I determined to bring them both up in ignorance of their rights, lest my brother who hated me, or my sister, who loved me, should one day bring me to the gallows. Indeed, I *denied* my brother's rights, and I early instilled into his heart the bitter fact that he had no name, no lineage.

"I loved Lucy. I did what I could for the little infant, who clung to me tenderly ; yet, after all, she led a wretched life.

"My brother was a young man, polished and handsome in spite of his profession, when I took it into my head to go to Cornwall, and take a look at the lands which ought to be mine. At this time I commanded a brig which was the fastest smuggler on the coast, and Alan held under his sway a few gallant spirits whom the world unkindly called highwaymen. From our visit to Cornwall arose all the events at Treval.

"I saw Treganowen Towers, and a most intense hatred and envy took possession of my soul. Especially I hated Ralph, your father, the presumed heir, and Alan, my brother, the true heir. I knew this last but for me might easily establish his claim, but now I more fiercely than ever resolved that he never should. I wished him dead, and began to hope that one day I might venture to bring forward Lucy—now a lovely child—as the heiress of Treganowen.

From the country gossip I discovered the unhappiness at Treval through Ralph's love for Alicia. I told the tale to my brother, and from his agitation and anger I learned the secret that he loved her himself. He had been playing the gentleman somewhere, and had met this young lady and presumed to address her. I taunted him with his effrontery in even speaking to a lady, and, to cut him more, I told him Ralph was his cousin, and it was fair that the man who had his name and Towers should take his bride also. He burst into a fury, and would have gone to Treganowen to challenge Ralph till I reminded him of our position, and asked him if our relationship to the Treganowens did ourselves or our mother any credit? The fact that his rival was of the same blood as himself added a sting to his jealousy which he was unable to bear. 'Hate is fierce like a Treganowen,' says a local proverb; it only does us justice; and Alan, now that he added hate to his love, was bent on success. I encouraged him to see the young lady and discover her inclinations. Hating all the seed of the Treganowens with a hatred which embraced also the Tremaines, I gloried in the thought of my brother bringing dishonour on the woman Ralph loved, and the sister of her whom his pledged word forced him to marry.

"But Alan had a picturesque code of his own, on which he painted some honour and truth, and it was only by working on his jealousy and love that he at last yielded to my arguments, and made up his mind to fly with Alicia Tremaine. He feared me greatly, and I knew he had resolved, on making

her his wife, to go abroad and enter the French service, but I determined he should never carry out this intention. I meant to make him and Alicia useful to my own interests and those of the band.

"Accident gave me the advantage of overhearing a conversation of hers, in which she related to Alan her discovery of a secret room and staircase at Treval. I need not tell you that I made use of this to rob the mansion on the night of her flight. To the very last Alan wavered, and it was only by telling him I meant immediately to quit Cornwall and he would see Alicia no more, save, perhaps, as the wife of Ralph—for I could not believe that he really intended to marry Mildred—that I at length persuaded him to run away with his bride. I chose the night before Mildred's wedding, thinking the blow would fall with double bitterness on Ralph, since the same day would see him deprived of the woman he loved and bound to the one he hated.

"I did not anticipate the hue-and-cry, the hubbub and fuss that moved the whole county of Cornwall. I thought common sense would tell people the young lady had fled with a lover, and so doubtless it would have done but for that injudicious robbing of Treval, which caused such different surmises to arise. The pursuit after us was so hot that we had to hide and use the greatest caution to avoid discovery. To make concealment more difficult, Alan had got wounded in an affray between us on the night of the robbery. Being in love, he could not perceive that our mutual interest

obliged me to many disagreeable duties, and among them I count the robbery at Treval. I had promised him that no one but myself should be made aware of the hidden room and staircase, and having kept my word in this, I considered he ought to have been satisfied. He was not, however; and in his disgust at the trade to which I had brought him, he would have destroyed us all by conniving at Alicia's escape. His wound had delayed their marriage, and the wretched young lady was nearly dead with shame, fear, and sorrow. She was hidden at a haunt of mine, and cared for by a young girl who had followed my fortune about two years before. Here also Alan lay wounded, and together they planned an escape. They intended Phœbe to accompany them, but she loved me, and she refused. Unhappily I did not know this, when I intercepted them at the moment of their flight. My life, and the lives of my crew, depended especially on Alicia's being kept in safety, for if she returned to Treval every haunt we had would be broken up. This is my excuse for the fury that made me blindly strike down the only creature who ever loved me. She was slain at the first blow. I cannot speak of her, Esther; let me pass this sad story over quickly. She bore a certain resemblance to Alicia in stature, complexion, and the colour of her hair; and one of my men suggested to me the idea, of stopping the search made for the missing young lady by sending her corpse to Treval. We could give her no burial save in the sea, and I laughed bitterly at the thought of deceiving the proud Tremaines, and gaining her a resting-place in their vault. On reflection it

scarcely seemed possible the deception could succeed, yet it was worth a trial, so Phoebe was dressed in Miss Tremaine's clothes, and taken to Treval in a wain laden with reeds, driven by two *honest* carters.

"You know how she was deposited at the north porch, and all that followed, and yet I purposely avoided any single written word on, or in, the coffin, asserting this to be the corpse of Alicia; but the first open-mouthed, gaping servant who gazed upon her shrieked 'Alicia!' and sapient jurymen, and learned coroner, and relations and friends all joined in the stupid cry. Father, lover, and sister believed it, and rained down tears on the disfigured face of poor Phoebe Linton. Only two doubted—Miss Mildred and Mr. Winterdale.

"Overwhelmed by Phoebe's death, I had consented to a whim of Alicia's, and restored her sister's bridal jewels. I did not tell her *how* they would go back to Treval, and she hid from me the fact of her having placed a letter in the casket. This circumstance, however, greatly favoured the deception, and throughout the country none doubted that the beautiful Miss Alicia Tremaine was murdered.

"Lucy was present when my blow struck down Phoebe. Years afterwards I told her this girl was Alicia Tremaine. I told her so that she might not be too curious respecting the fate of my brother's wife. Lucy—the beautiful little child I had protected from infancy—was now the only creature I loved. I taught her to love me, and I always impressed on her mind that I was her *only* brother, scarcely ever permitting her even to see Alan.

"I did not heed much the cruel accusation of murder brought against Miss Mildred, till one of our gang was shot while following his vocation. Then I found out he had betrayed my confidence; he was a crony of mine, and I had sometimes dropped to him mysterious hints respecting the heirship of Treganowen. These he had sold to Miss Mildred. I guessed that instantly, and by her singular silence during this terrible period, I formed an idea of her rare courage, and I divined that she was as firmly resolved as myself that Alan Treganowen should never possess the Towers.

"We sailed for Ireland immediately after the burial of Phœbe at Trevalla, and here my brother and Alicia were married. I would have hindered their marriage if I could, for my heart was hot with hatred and jealousy for Phœbe's sake, but Alan outwitted me, and I had the mortification of knowing, that the brother whom I had tried to bring to my level, had won for himself a fair young bride of name, and lineage as ancient as his own. I gnashed my teeth as I saw he had found a fitting mate, in spite of all I had done to degrade him; while I, for him and for her, had murdered—— Esther! can you wonder that I hated him more than ever? And, above all, can you wonder that I hated Alicia, with a loathing that ran coldly and cruelly in my veins, stirring me to bitter deeds every time I looked on her pale face?

"I reproached her often with Phœbe's death; it was a relief to call her murderess,* and lay upon her soul

* NOTE BY ESTHER.—Hence the sharp and amazed fear with which she heard my cry on the roof of, "Stop, demon! thief! murderess!"

the guilt that was mine, and it pleased me to see remorse and grief withering away her life. Not that she dared show any of this to my brother, for Alan's great fault was jealousy—an unreasoning, blind jealousy that demanded his wife's whole soul. Thinking constantly of Phœbe, I would not permit him any happiness ; I worked constantly on his jealous nature till I rendered his life a misery to him.

“ ‘ Can she love *you* ? ’ I sneered—‘ you a robber, and she a lady ? Do not believe her if she says so ; she speaks from fear, not love. She loves Ralph ; she ran away with you to vex *him*. ’

“ ‘ Alan was bound by an oath never to divulge his wife's existence at Treval, but it needed not this to stop him. Jealousy was stay enough ; to tell that she lived would have been to lose her. And as for Alicia herself, sorrow, and shame, and terror had so wrung her heart that she was glad her father and sisters should think her dead. She would never return to Treval to confess she had been the associate of thieves, and was the wife of a robber.* There is a curse on marriages consummated in disobedience to parents, and it had fallen on her heavily ; still Alan's love might have given her some happiness but for my restless hatred, which would not permit it.

“ I had gained an insight into Miss Mildred's character and deep devotion to Ralph, and I determined to see her and speak to her of Lucy. I began by writing anonymous letters, in which I slandered

* This fixed but mistaken idea of Paul's was doubtless the reason why he never guessed the truth.

Alicia. I did not fear to do this. I was sure she had never been deceived by the dead girl in the north porch. She was the only one at Treval or Treganowen who had a head with brains in it, and I respected her sense all the more, and resolved with less hesitation to trust her with the tale of Lucy's birth, because she neither answered my letters nor heeded my demands for money.

"But during my machinations an event occurred for which I was not prepared. My brother escaped from my power, but by some failure in their plans Alicia missed him at their place of meeting, and, frightened and betrayed by her companion, she was brought back into my hands. Alan thought I only held his wife out of hatred to him, and he expected now he was once gone I should permit her to follow. He wrote beseeching her to join him. She never had his letters! He wrote grandly of redeeming his name by a life of honour, and when he had won fame and the right to respect, he would take his wife to Treval and reconcile her to her family.

"I replied to his letters myself. I told him his wife had disappeared from the house where I had placed her, and Slater—the ruined, dissipated *gentleman* who had joined us, of whom he was jealous—was missing also, and I mockingly asked if he had seen them? With my letter I sent such proofs of my statement that, to a jealous nature like his, they were sufficient. I never heard from him again, and to this day I know not whether he is alive or dead.

"To Alicia I said her husband had forsaken her—

no tidings, no letter reached her—she believed me, and she wept herself blind. I was too hard to heed her wretchedness. She sat always alone, brooding over her sorrows, till she grew helplessly weak. Not too weak, though, to try to escape with her child ; but she fell in her blindness, and was picked up a shattered wreck. When she recovered from the terrible suffering that held her to her bed for months, we ceased to watch her, and again she escaped with her son—this time successfully.

“She left a note for me, saying she and her boy might die, but he should never live to be a thief. Doubtless she perished, for if she lives I must have discovered her retreat. But, living or dead, she is the only creature I fear ; for to her I was so merciless, vindictive, and cruel, that the least of my sins against her would thrust me deep into perdition. If ever she rises up against me I must die ; if ever I hear her voice again, the sea will not be deep enough to drown the anguish and horror I shall feel ; let me perish, let me go down into the pit, but never let me see Alicia Tremaine, living or dead !

“She *must* be dead ; for weak, forlorn, blind as she was, she could not have travelled far. I think she must have sunk at Bristol, for I traced her thither, and then heard of a blind woman falling by the roadside exhausted, who was taken to the workhouse and died there the same night. Thus I firmly believe perished the once beautiful Alicia Tremaine.

“One night, Esther, just after her accident, when we thought her dying, she called me to her bedside, and

exacted from me an oath that I would never divulge to anyone the secret of the Red Room. Her constant fear was that I should tell my associates, and they or I would use the secret to rob or murder her family. I took the oath, and I have kept it. Hence I cannot sell you this secret, Esther; and even in confessing the fact of there being a secret chamber at Treval, I feel as though Alicia's vengeance would strike me down.

"After her escape I went down to Treval, and gained an interview with Miss Mildred. I met her on a solitary walk, and commanded her instant attention by uttering the name of Barbara. All I shall now relate I wrung from her after many interviews, both of us being too cautious for confidences at first; but I tell it at once to save words.

"I watched how her eyes glistened when I declared the young Treganowen was illegitimate and a thief; and I marked the clear, glad ring of her voice as she said in that case he could never claim Treganowen. Then I spoke to her of Lucy, whom I loved so dearly, and I showed her the certificate of my mother's marriage, and said I was bent on asserting Lucy's rights. Miss Mildred soon drew from me the fact that Lucy knew nothing of these herself, and then she coldly explained that if her claims were legally established they would only entitle her to £10,000. It was not worth my while to risk my neck for the chance of this sum, and I was going disappointed away on this our third interview, when Miss Mildred's sudden, close questions on the likelihood of Lucy's marrying made me guess

the truth, that perhaps her child would be the heir of Treganowen. I acted on this guess, and pretended I had found Lucy a husband. After this Miss Mildred and I soon understood one another better, and she asked if Lucy were a girl whom her cousin Ralph could marry. I caught at this scheme—it would suit me better than any other. I should see Lucy a lady, living at Treganowen, enjoying her rights, her name, her place, all which Miss Mildred I knew would aid me to withhold from Alan.

“The only hindrance to this plan was Miss Mildred’s repugnance to ally Ralph Treganowen with Lucy’s robber-brother. Thinking to conquer this by showing her how nearly she was allied to him herself, I told her this very man was the husband of Alicia.

“She turned deadly pale at this, and said that if that were so she would not aid Lucy to marry Ralph, as the marriage would not give her children Treganowen; for if her brother had a child—his wife *being a lady*—it would inherit the Towers; and in her agitation she spoke of some will which debarred him from his lands if he married any other save an honourable lady. Then I perceived that in helping him to carry away Alicia I had assisted towards the gaining of his estates, and I had ruined Lucy’s prospects, so in my rage I determined on another sin. Miss Mildred’s words betrayed to me that in her heart she gave no *real* credence to the slur I put on young Treganowen’s birth, or the slander I uttered against her sister. She gave a feigned faith to these things for Ralph’s sake. One strong, unfeigned belief she had—namely, that my

father had but *one* son. I determined to personate that one, so I now confessed I was the son of Barbara, the brother of Lucy, and it was I who had stolen Alicia, and I impudently added with an oath that I was not her husband.

"White as death Miss Mildred listened; then starting from me as though I were some reptile, she waved her hand and bade me trouble her no more.

" 'Claim the name of Treganowen for yourself or for your sister,' she said, 'and I will hang you.'

"I retaliated by threatening to divulge Alicia's willing flight and shame.

" 'Do so,' answered Miss Mildred quietly; 'I shall be glad.'

"And she looked as if she *would* be glad to have that mystery torn to pieces and thrown to the four winds. Then suddenly she asked if Alicia's child were dead. I denied she had one, but she answered she had had sure word there was a child. I confessed the truth at this, and that I did not know what had become of it.

" 'But what matters it?' I asked, 'since I and Alicia had only a thieves' wedding, a gipsy marriage; will that make the child an heir?'

"Her face flamed, and for a moment she was silent; then, as the colour died away and her cheek grew ashy pale, she said softly—

" 'And where is my sister now?'

"I told her of Alicia's escape, adding, she was dead, and I had seen her grave at Bristol.

"Miss Mildred looked at me strangely, but without

a tear, merely saying, graves were deceptive, and that the poor corpse in the north porch had never deceived her.

"Then she left me abruptly; and so great was her hatred, her shuddering abhorrence of my presence, that it was only after many months and many threats on my part that I induced her to see me again. Then I told her loudly I could prove the legitimacy of my birth if I chose, as my mother, under the name of Treloar, was certainly married a year before the birth of her son; and it was when this child was stolen by robbers, that my father, wishing to make his next child his heir, had married Barbara again by her true name of Polwhele. But I was a man with blood on my hand, I said, and I would keep quiet if she would promise that Lucy should be mistress of Treganowen, otherwise I would claim my right.

" 'At the first breath you utter claiming Treganowen,' said Miss Mildred, 'I will have you arrested for the murder of Phœbe; and who will listen to a felon's ravings?' she asked scornfully. Then she added, while so ghastly a ruffian as I lived, Lucy should never be Ralph's wife.

"She quitted me without a word more; and though I tried in many ways to change her resolve, I found her inexorable, deaf to threats, heedless of menaces: truly I was no match for Miss Mildred!

"Yet during this warfare I knew she went to Plymouth to look furtively at Lucy; and I knew by strict scrutiny and many questions she had discovered that whatever Lucy's failings of vanity and frivolity,

no word could be uttered against her fame. In spite of a wandering life of crime, I had guarded her so jealously that not a man in my band dared speak a word in her presence that could sully her thoughts. And by many a hint of the splendid fortune which fate held in store for her, I taught her to scorn all humble lovers, and I so awoke her vanity and ambition, that the few men she saw hated her pride, more than they admired her beauty.

"It was during Miss Mildred's steady silence that I discovered Alicia had left her infant son at Mr. Winterdale's house at Clifton, and his sister, a widow lady named Spencer, had gone abroad, taking the child with her.

"Alarmed, I went in disguise to Trevalla, and saw Mr. Winterdale. I found him Miss Mildred's most deadly enemy. I found that he, too, suspected it was not Alicia whom they had buried in the vault of the Tremaines, and he was living now the life of a hunter tracking down his prey. I trembled for my life. If he once got on the trail of the truth, I might make sure of the gallows; my brother, if living, would know all my villany towards him and his wife; Alicia's name would be righted, and her son, or—more bitter still—my hated brother, would inherit Treganowen.

"There was only one person in the world who could save me—only one person who was a worthy antagonist for Mr. Winterdale—Miss Mildred.

"For my own safety's sake, and to gratify alike my vengeance, my hatred, my affection, and my pride, I wanted Treganowen for Lucy; she wanted it for Ralph;

if we did not come to an agreement soon all would be lost.

“ ‘For Ralph’s sake she would not stop short even of crime,’ I said to myself, ‘but she fears his horror at finding himself allied to me. Well, then, he shall never know it ; and until Lucy is safely married, even Miss Mildred shall think me dead.’

“ ‘I went to Lucy and tutored her. I bade her write to the beautiful lady who had paid her a visit, and say she was in great distress, for her brother was dead. Why make many words of the tale ? It was well told, and it succeeded. In less than a year from that time she was Mrs. Ralph Treganowen.

“ ‘The story I made her tell was not exactly a falsehood, for I had seen in the papers the death of a man bearing the name my brother Alan had taken. He was a soldier, and was killed while gallantly defending a gun. Alan had often talked of enlisting. I believe it was he.

“ ‘When Lucy was safely married I presented myself suddenly before Miss Mildred, and warned her of Mr. Winterdale’s enmity. She scorned me and it, and commanded me never to trouble her again. I reminded her we both had the same end in view, and I told her Alicia’s son lived, and might one day make his claims good. Every allusion to her sister always crimsoned her pale cheek, and brought into her eyes a strange agony.

“ ‘Never speak to me of *your* child, Paul Polwhele,’ she said ; ‘by your own confession he has no legal rights. I do not wish to know that he lives. I do

not desire to hear where he is. Do not force me to find him, if you wish your sister's children to inherit Treganowen.'

"Upon this I gave her no hint that he had fallen into Mr. Winterdale's hands, but I watched that relentless man, and strove in vain to probe his motives and actions.*

"After indefatigable search I discovered where my mother was first married, but Mr. Winterdale had been before me and taken a copy of the register. I bought one also, and brought it to Miss Mildred.

"'You were born long before this date,' she said, looking at me keenly. 'And how can you prove that Barbara Treloar was Barbara Polwhele?'

"'I can prove it; but what does that matter so I can prove the birth of the son born to this couple after their marriage?'

"'Still you are a robber,' she answered, 'and *your* son, you say——'

"She stopped; she seemed to stifle with her own words. I saw she regarded me as the destroyer of her sister, with a loathing and horror that pierced her frame with a chill like death, but I was obliged to go on; it was necessary to make her understand our danger.

"'I have said so,' I replied, 'but I may not have spoken truly. I may be able to give you the cer-

* The almost constant residence of Mr. Winterdale at Trevalla would seem to have prevented any suspicion of the truth in Miss Mildred's mind. For the same reason, Alicia evidently doubted whether her son had reached his hands or not.

tificate of Alicia's marriage. I may be able to prove all her son's rights to Treganowen——'

" 'Hold !' she cried suddenly ; ' I have resolved to keep Treganowen for Ralph's children, and I will resist all other claims to the last !'

" 'Now we understand each other,' I answered. ' You are right ; I was born twelve years before the date of that marriage. I can never claim these estates—curses on my father for his selfish cruelty !—but my younger brother shall not have them. Like you, I want them for Lucy and her children. I will never bring forward this boy, the true heir ; but beware of Mr. Winterdale ! the day will come when he will do it.'

" Then, as gasping for breath, unable to speak, she leant against a tree for support, I rapidly explained the circumstances of my birth and history, my theft of my brother, the strange education I gave him, and his marriage with Alicia.

" 'You lied in the beginning—you may be lying now,' she answered faintly.

" I reiterated with oaths my statement, telling her I made this confession that she might know what she had to fear—namely, the bringing forward of her sister's son by an enemy—and I trusted now she would provide against it. I added she could see I was an earnest coadjutor, a faithful accomplice as eagerly desiring to cheat the rightful heir for Lucy's sake, and from hate to Alan, as she, did from love to Ralph.

" At these words Miss Mildred trembled for the

first time since I had known her. She gazed at me in speechless horror—she put her hand to her heart.

“‘Must I bear even this?’ she murmured faintly. Then suddenly, though tears sprang to her eyes, she held her head erect. ‘You are right,’ she said; ‘Alicia has broken my heart and crushed my happiness—her son shall not steal Ralph’s inheritance. The son of a robber—whether you or your wretched brother be her husband, or whether she be no wife at all—he shall never enter Treganowen as its heir. Go! we understand each other now. Destroy every proof you may possess of your marriage, if it be yours—of your brother’s, if it be his—and NEVER bring me tidings of Alicia’s son? Yes; we are accomplices—we work for the same end. Come to me when you want help or money—an accomplice has a right to demand these.’

“I saw through what fiery agony this proud woman passed as she stooped to say these words, and I pitied her. Believe me, Esther, it has only been under the direst necessity that I have ever asked Miss Mildred for aid. I have obeyed her. I have never brought her tidings of Hubert Treganowen. Sometimes by my eyes I have said—

“‘He lives; he can be found.’

“Once in answer to this look she replied—

“Paul Polwhele, remember I have the admiral’s word that his brother left but *one* son; more, I have your father’s word to the same effect. If Lucy acknowledges *you* as her brother, I deny altogether that this

man whom you call Alan is the son of Mr. Ralph Treganowen.'

"To you, Esther, who know her beauty, and the softness and gentleness under which she hides her iron will, and her wondrous power to attract and to subdue, I need not say that I was her slave. I admired her unflinching courage, and I worked for her and for you, without ever hinting to her by a word what I had done or was doing.

"Once I shot at Hubert Treganowen, and once and always I have defeated all Mr. Winterdale's efforts to discover where Alan Treganowen and Alicia Tremaine were married. His emissaries have visited many places, but that bleak, lone church standing above the swell of the Atlantic on the wild western coast of Ireland has not yet echoed to their tread.

"Esther, I write you all this because I can aid Miss Mildred no longer. Whether it be conscience or whether it be death whispering to me I know not, but I must tell the truth, even if I write it in my blood.

"Sometimes I fancy I hear the dying voice of Phoebe calling me to her, or, like one impelled towards a precipice, I feel some ghastly attraction from the dead Alicia Tremaine that will bring me face to face with her accusing spirit.

"Yes, I know that Mr. Winterdale has tracked me down, and I go to my last shelter to die.

"Three years ago I fled abroad to avoid him; in a year he had found me, and sent my nephew to hunt me. I denounced Hubert as a spy, and he was thrown into prison.

Esther ! Treganowen Towers are his ; I charge you not to accept them at Miss Mildred's hands. I will be at Treval on the day before that appointed for your marriage ; then I will do justice to my brother and his wife, and may Heaven forgive me for the black cruelty I have practised on them both ! Look for my appearing, and wait for me ere you speak. I have a sure way of entering. I go to a spot which I have not seen since the night before Mildred's wedding. Surely I am safe there, even from Mr. Winterdale. Yet as I write I shudder, and lest I should never see you again in life, I send you inclosed the name of the church in which was solemnized, the marriage of Alicia Tremaine and Alan Treganowen.

"Farewell, Esther ! You see I do not implore you to yield up these riches. I know you will fling them down eagerly, passionately, when you find they are not justly yours.

"Speak comfortably to Miss Mildred. Ask her to forgive me. If I have any sorrow in making this atonement, it is that I grieve her. I would not hurt her for a thousand worlds. If she has sinned, remember it is for your father's sake. And, Esther, when you love, love like her.


"PAUL POLWHELE."

CHAPTER XII.

BETWEEN the day of Mildred's death and that appointed for her funeral, Miss Admonitia changed from a stately, and handsome lady, to a woman aged and broken, yet with nervous anxiety she busied herself to get all things arranged with becoming respect and costly magnificence.

"Esther," she said, "let us have white flowers to place on the bier—pure white—no others. Tell the gardener to force as many as possible to bloom in the hothouses, and when the day comes I will weave them into a crown myself."

Far and near, the country gentry stripped their greenhouses for us, and on the morning of the funeral I brought her a rich heap



of rare flowers, all snowy white. Calm and tearless, she sat by the window, weaving them into a garland.

"Esther, there are no violets, no white violets, here," she said suddenly. "She planted some herself on the cedar-root when she had that fine old tree cut down. I will go and gather them."

"Miss Admonitia, the grass is wet—the violets are scarcely in bloom," I answered.

But Miss Admonitia, waving me aside, stepped out upon the lawn, and in a moment I saw her stooping over the old root, searching for violets. At this instant a servant called me away, and when I returned Miss Admonitia was still searching for violets. Hurriedly I went to her, and spoke in a whisper—

"Miss Admonitia, they—they are waiting. There is no time to gather more."

"I want enough for *two*," she answered. "I gather for her and me."

Her speech was impeded — broken — strange. She lifted her face towards me, and I saw *death* on it. I shrieked aloud for help. Servants came to me; we carried her in, and placed her in the arm-chair where she had sat weaving the funeral flowers. Then, thinking of Mildred still, she stretched forth her hand and took them, and, as her fingers strove feebly to weave the violets to the wreath, a heavy sigh broke from her lips, and her spirit fled.

How could we have so deceived ourselves? How could we imagine she was bearing up bravely, and would survive this loss? It was folly to think it. She had lived for Mildred all her life long; when Mildred died, we might have known she would die too. To her, what was there left to live for?

I took the violets from her dead hand, and divided them between her and Mildred. Had the cedar-tree beckoned to me so often

in my dreams for this, or was the secret I read in its branches half so sad, as the story told by the lowly flowers that grew at its root?

We buried them together, and one tablet records their names and their affection.

Truly this ancient mansion deserved its name of Treval*—the Dwelling of Death, or the House of the Farewell—and whether it was so called in honour of the two brothers, or because its glittering roof was the last thing seen at sea when sailing from the west, it was equally appropriate.


The will of the two sisters, dated long back, left Treval to my father, and, after him, to his daughter Alice, and though, since Alicia lived, he considered the legacy null and void, and Treval hers by right, yet, since it was her earnest wish still to

* "Tre" means town; but in Cornwall, town retains its old meaning of dwelling, a farmyard being often called a town-place, and in Cornish the word "val,"—farewell—means also death.

hide her story and her existence from the world, he took advantage of this testament to establish me at the old mansion, as if it were my right to be here, thus avoiding all remark and wonder.

Shall I prolong this story, now that all interest in it has died with Miss Mildred? Does any one care enough for me to ask how I fulfilled a task which had tried the iron courage of a martyr? I had no help in it, for my father shrank from the sight of Alicia, and sought in action relief from his sad thoughts. He rejoined the army immediately after the funeral of the sisters, his last act in England being his renunciation on my behalf of Treganowen. The old Towers were shut up, and given into the care of Mr. Tresidder, who wrote, by my father's request, to Hubert, to say that no legal difficulties would be placed in the way of his taking possession.

In Hubert's reply, he begged Mr.



Tresidder not to allow his claims to transpire, and desired him to implore Miss Treganowen, as a favour, to let the world still consider the Towers hers or her father's—at least till he could procure liberty to return to England.

Owing him all I did, and dreading the necessity of publishing so strange a family history as ours, I partially obeyed his wish, Mr. Tresidder remitted to him the revenues of Treganowen, and I bore silently the public talk which gave them to me.


With a trembling hand I wrote to Hubert a full history of all that had passed, and I told him, if he would let me retain Miss Mildred's only legacy to me—his mother—I would care for her like—I dared not say daughter, so I said sister. Oh! how long the post was in those days amid war and tumult! But the answer came at last.

“Take care of my mother, birdie, till the

French set me free, and may God bless you!"

That was all, and for nearly two years that was still all that I heard of Hubert Treganowen.

How I loved him through this time, and how I discovered that I had always loved him, let those say who have read this history. But I had no hope now—none. The garland of withered leaves that I had woven for my chaplet, seemed my only fitting crown, and to watch the dead, like Mildred, my only fitting fate. Truly, as I said early in this story, I sat down many days in my desolation like the man of Uz, gathering in those ashes that were the fruit of vanity and hate. Too late I saw how the sin of Mildred's secret had woven its coil around me, and how my fitful and morbid nature had beaten itself against my true happiness, and sought feverishly the joy to be found in hatred, vanity, and



passion. My love for Stephen was sorrow and disease; my love for Hubert was health and gladness.

In Mr. Winterdale's haste, he left on the table of the Red Room my strange manuscript, written during my period of somnambulism. With what joy I read here that THEN, when I was my own free, untrammelled self, every secret cleared up, enjoying the full knowledge of Alicia's history, as told me by Mildred, aware of her pitiful desire to injure and grieve my father, as some palliation to her chafed spirit, for the injury she did to others for his sake—aware, too, of my sister's existence, and our mutual love—ah, then let me say again with what joy I saw I loved Hubert, only Hubert!

And now, when in the clearing up of all these mysteries, my second self—the Esther of every day—understood plainly the things known before only to the somnambulist—to that other mystic self who had hitherto

eluded all my efforts to grasp her—now when this strange duality within me became one, and I united the poor little sea-changeling of Treval, with the lost Esther of India, with the Esther of the blank time, with the Esther who had a sister—a twin self—with the Esther who in fever and in weakness had clung to Hubert for strength, and comfort—oh, now, now indeed I loved him!—I—my *whole* self—I loved him so truly, so tenderly, that tears, and prayers, and holy thoughts, and good deeds, and daily kindnesses, and a thousand charities, sprang out of my love for him, and grew into my nature, engrafted there by the memory of his true, brave, good heart.

“O Hubert, Hubert,” I cried, “I love you! If I could die for you, I would die joyfully; for then perhaps you might believe in my love. But now I cannot tell it, I cannot hope you will believe it, for was I not nearly the wife of Stephen Tremaine?”

If I could show him this history, I thought, written by the shadowy Esther, who in sleep always came back to her right mind, he would see that *she* loved him.

Sometimes I half regretted this departed Esther, the somnambulist, for—have I said it?—the moment I found her she fled; the searching, the craving, the yearning that had bewildered me so long died away; the old lost look faded out of my eyes, and I was sane, and sound, and healthy as the most commonplace of mortals.

Ah! how in the old days at Treganowen, this shadowy Esther had fled before me, while, searching, searching, searching, I wandered restless from room to room, dimly longing for the light and the love, that had wrapped me about at Treval! And oh! in my blindness I fancied the love I missed was Stephen's. I did not dream it was my sister's, it was Mildred's, Alicia's, Hubert's. And Alice's love, *his* mother's love, I had

still; but *his* I had lost, lost for ever. The phantom self, ever evading my grasp, whom I had pursued so long, was found; but in seizing it, the friend I loved better than self was gone—faded out of my life, never to return.

Slowly, slowly the days dropped down upon us from the dull sky, some of them hot and sultry, some of them icy cold, and tearful with the spray of the western sea. Through them all I loved Hubert hopelessly, but not in sullen grief—had I not his mother with me? I will not say what we were to each other; every heart that loves can draw that picture for itself.

Mr. Tresidder and Lord Roscorla kept our secret well. There was no need, then, to tear the history of Alicia Tremaine from its shroud, forcing us to proclaim our relationship to an assassin, and tell that Hubert's father was made by his vile arts a robber; but there was need, imperative

learn that Imbert's mother should not remain hidden in her poverty prison. She urged for her light, cheerfulness; so Martha and I after discussing many plans, decided on one that seemed feasible, and, by Mr. Treval's aid, I proved successful.

We prepared the servants for the arrival of a stranger from India—a Mrs. Treganwen, a distant relation of mine. We made them get a room ready for her; we talked of her continually, knowing that what we said would be carried by many a gossip far and near. Then we improvised a village ~~for~~ at Trevala Church-town, and insisted on every servant joining in it; and during their absence, having the house to ourselves, our visitor arrived unexpectedly. Thus, quietly and without question, did the pale, blind lady take her place at Treval, without causing a surmise or a doubt.

It would be long to tell how she gradually grew better—how light, air, liberty—

in one word, life, and, above all, the dear hope of seeing her son, changed that once woful face into cheerfulness, and some return of its old beauty.

It was during this long, lonely time that the poor Buttercup, armed with a letter from Miss Priscilla, travelled down to Cornwall, and laid his heart at my feet.

"And would I be Lady Buttercup?" he said. Then, indeed, Mannamead would be worthy of its name; a sojourn flowing with milk and honey; and he should feel himself a king.

"Alas! no," I answered. And I felt very sorrowful, and full of shame as I remembered the cruel vanity that had so deliberately striven to raise his admiration. I was punished sharply, for he lingered in the village many weeks; he came again and again to Treval. He grew thin and shadowy; he seemed to wither on his stem—the poor Buttercup!—as though the earth

need, that Hubert's mother should not remain hidden in her gloomy prison. She pined for air, light, cheerfulness; so Martha and I, after discussing many plans, decided on one that seemed feasible, and, by Mr. Tresidder's help, it proved successful.

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was parched, and there was no moisture left for his leaves. Then, thinking to comfort him, because, like a cynic, I half believed his grief was for Treganowen Towers, I told him in confidence there was another claimant to all my mines and manors, and while he lived I should never dispute his rights; hence I was truly poor as a church mouse.

The pallid Buttercup listened, and—may Heaven forgive my shameful disbelief!—as he listened he brightened. Then from the little village inn, where he led a pastoral life, he wrote me a magnanimous letter.

Was he not Sir Baldwin Buttercombe, of Mannamead? he asked. Was there anyone to thwart him, now his father was dead? Should he not marry where he had a liking? So he prayed me no longer to fear my want of fortune, or his mother's anger, but yield to the dictates of my heart. And he would show me he could be gene-

rous ; he would make liberal settlements ; I should be Lady Buttercombe, and he, the lord of my life and my love, would prove to the world that he had a soul above money. I laughed a little, half crying the while, as I read the letter to Hubert's mother. Then when he came again I had to tell him, that the dictates of my heart said no ! and, poor or rich, I could never be Lady Buttercombe.

Slightly angry at this, and blushing brightly yellow, he told me he gave me credit for more sense ; I rejected a position which would place me on the topmost of the green hills of Devon. And if I were indeed poor, he could not understand my reasons.

The poor Buttercup ! How could he comprehend that any dowerless maiden could possibly object to *him* ?

He rode away disconsolate and angry, and I truly grieved for him, and moodily

reproached myself—too keenly, I think ; for when I saw him years afterwards he had a substantial dowager by his side, and little Buttercups springing up all around.

“See what you have lost,” he said, as, gleaming on me through his spectacles, he pointed to the prosperity of Mannamead.

“See what you have gained !” I answered, as I glanced towards his wife and children.

The poor man sighed, yet, nevertheless, he was very happy, I knew.

* * * * *

Mrs. Treganowen heard often from Hubert, but Martha always read the letters to her, and, since there was no word sent to me, I would not ask questions. I bore his silence—I deserved it ; what could he think of me ? Doubtless he had driven from his memory, the ungrateful girl, who had so quickly forgotten she owed life and health to his kindness. Sometimes I thought that,


even if he despised me, he might write a word of thanks for my care of his mother, but this thought only made me redouble my tenderness to her. She was very kind, very loving to me. She knew I suffered. When my sister married, and came to live at Pencarrow, she turned towards me sorrowfully. I answered with a smile and a kiss.

"And it is not that?" she asked, hurriedly. "You gave up Stephen for your sister's sake; you have not grieved for him all this time?"

"No! no!" I cried, and my smile changed to tears. "How could you mistake me so? Hubert—Hubert has forgotten me!"

I escaped from her clasping arms, and ran to my own room. There I tried to stop my sobs with thoughts of Alice.

I had seen her often. She had spent months with me at Treval, bringing song and joy with her, like a bird. The affec-



tion between us knew no bounds in its confidence; so, from the first, I heard of Stephen's inobtrusive attentions, his calm, quiet, observant manner (perhaps he thought Esther's twin sister might have somewhat of that termagant in her disposition), and, lastly, his timid avowal of love. All this—so different to his behaviour to me—showed experience had done him good, and I no longer feared for my sister's happiness.

One sunny day in June, nineteen months after Miss Mildred's and Miss Admonitia's death, and three months after Alice's wedding, I was sitting on the lawn reading, when a voice startled me.

“Lor'-a-mussy me, Miss Esther!” exclaimed the voice; “ef you don't kiss me this blessed minute, I shall go clean out of my mind.”

“Jenifer! Jenifer! oh, my dear Jenifer!”

I had my arms around her, and crying, laughing, talking, we kissed again and again.

"Jenifer! you wicked Jenifer! Why did you forsake me? Where have you been? What a smart lady you are! how pretty you have grown!"


"Don't 'ee, Miss Esther; please, don't 'ee now, co. You know I never could abide strams. 'Tis you that have grown handsomer nor a pictur'. And how do 'ee think our buffle-head Tom is looking, miss?"

Tom! I had not seen Tom Pengrath standing by, and my face flushed now to sudden crimson.

"Where is your master, Tom?" I faltered.

There was a great clump of laurels close at hand, and from these there sprang a figure, with a merry laugh.

"Why, *here* is his master!" cried the doctor, taking Jenifer by the arm—"decidedly his master. Allow me to introduce you to Mrs. Tom Pengrath."



Trembling I stood looking from one to the other with flushing cheeks, and eyes shining with tears; and thus blinded, I did not see that Tom and Jenifer stole away, neither did I know how I found myself beneath the laurels, hidden by acacia and myrtles, and there the doctor, holding out his arms, said—

“Esther, birdie, may I love you now?”

I sprang to his breast, and wept there such tears of joy as scarcely the angels know.

* * * * *

“And you never guessed I was taking care of the doctor for 'ee?” said Jenifer.

“Why, in coorse, when I left you I went to him straight. I'd took care of you so long for him, Miss Esther, that I reckoned 'twas time to try a spell of work t'other way; and he had tould me to guard Miss Esther; he didn't say a word about Lady Tremaine. I was to watch Miss Esther,

and not mind her wearing my life out by wandering about like a sperret; and I was to write and tell him news of her, which I did with ink up to my elbows, miss; so I couldn't write that whisht news you know of, Miss Esther, so I car'd it to him, and—
augh! Miss Esther! Miss Esther! ef it hadn't been for me, he'd have growed lonesome as a coot; but I talked to 'un about you, and said I knawed Miss Mildred had put a spell on you, and you'd come back to your awn true self afore it was too late. He was fine and whisht in France, miss, for he was a debt-new after he got out of preson—though why a debt-new, when he never owed a farding, ould or new, I can't say. At aal events, they furriners wouldn't let him go."

"And how came you to marry Tom Pengrath, Jenifer?" said I, with quickened breath, for this talk of Hubert made my heart beat fast.

“It comed about mighty easy, Miss Esther. I was telling ’un waun day that he was a chucklehead sort of chap, and the doctor was that kind and good to him that he ought to turn hissself ento a cherry-beam ef he could, to show his thanks. ‘Wal,’ he says, ‘Jenifer, I reckon you are right.’ ‘And there ar’n’t narra man en aal tha world,’ I says, ‘to fellow tha doctor fur goodness and fur truth, leave alone that his eyes would slock any woman from London to Jeerusalem in waun day, and she wouldn’t be tired nuther.’ ‘I never heard nobody express theirselves so well as you, Jenifer,’ Tom answers; ‘but I’d go funder for ’un than Jeerusalem—Jeerusalem aint no account—I’d go to Scotland for ’un, I would! Augh! Jenifer, ef you’d been en prison with ’un, as I’ve ben, and seen how he minded tha sick, and how he had a kind word and a sunny smile a had, and a cheerful look, and a kind deed a had, for every

poor soul there, that was wisht and heart-broken, why, dang it, Jenifer maid, thee'd'st think gould wasn't good enough for 'un to walk on, and di'monds wasn' purty enough for 'un to eat.' 'Hould thee tongue, Tom,' says I; 'dout I know waun of his eyelashes is worth more than thy whole body?'

"Thic is tha way we talked, Miss Esther, and when we found we was both of waun mind, nat'rally enough we married."

I will not touch upon the meeting between mother and son; there are thoughts and feelings no human words can dare depict. I will tell only how unworthy I was of the full joy that stifled speech, when she praised me to her son, and put my hand in his and bade God bless us.

"Oh, Hubert," I cried, when, taking Martha's arm, his mother left us alone, "how can I accept all this happiness? I

do not merit your love. I was going to—to marry Sir Stephen Tremaine.”

His name choked me, and vexed tears rained over my face.

“My poor Esther,” said Hubert, “you do not think you ever loved that gaudy bird, do you?”

“I fancied so once,” I answered, and a half smile broke through my tears.

“No, Esther, it was my aunt Mildred you loved, not Stephen. You obeyed her wishes unconsciously. She was a woman,” he added, “with fascination and power enough to command an army. Shall I be angry that one poor little fluttering birdie could not resist her spell? What a struggle yours must have been, Esther, when you resolved to grieve her and strike all her plans to pieces?”

I remembered my hard battle by the pool, and told him of it.

“And you thought you had conquered,”

said Hubert; "but I doubt if you would have found courage to speak but for me."

"For you, when you were so far away!"

"Yes, for me! for I was come back to my old place in your thoughts then, Esther. You had read Paul's story, and you knew I was not his son. Ah, birdie! if you had not feared me, now my shadow was linked in your mind, with the red hand of that terrible man, you would never have let Miss Mildred entangle you in such a net."

"What you say is true," said I, wondering at his penetration. "I was in great horror. I should have died of grief if I had dared to dwell on the thought that you were Paul's son."

"Esther," said Hubert, in a grave, sad tone, "will you be frightened if I tell you something of my father?"

"Tell me what you will," I answered, as

my face turned deathly pale, "it cannot alter my love for you."

"Esther, dear, I saw him last year. I visited his grave but a month ago. In all joy there is sorrow. I thought to bring him to Treval, but he perished in battle. He was a colonel in the French service. Now, tell me, shall I disturb my mother's peace with this story and all the narrative of our mutual discovery of each other, our long explanations, his sorrow, and his joy; or shall I let things rest as they are?"

"Tell her!" I answered, clasping my hands. "O Hubert, tell her! for see how glad I am to hear this, and think how dearer than life to a woman is her husband's honour!"

It was a long story—to be guessed at, not told here—and years after, when peace came, we took her and our little children to the cemetery by the River Rosbach, and

we read the few words inscribed on a plain tomb:—

“TO THE MEMORY
OF
COLONEL TREGANONE,
WHO PERISHED AT THE BATTLE OF WAGRAM.”

When the time came, we obeyed her wish, and laid her dust by his side.

* * * * *

“Hubert,” said I one day suddenly, “do you mind my being poor?”

“Do I mind your being rich, you mean?” he answered. “The Towers, the estates are all yours, Esther. Can you think I will kill my mother, and gratify a gaping world with this terrible family history, merely to gain a fortune for myself? No. When I marry the *heiress* of Treganowen, I will take the grand old name, and inhabit the Towers, if she will, not else.”

“Hubert!” I cried, touched, amazed by his words, “this, then, is the reason you made Mr. Tresidder keep silence? But I

will never submit to this cruel decree of yours—never!”

“Well, we shall see,” he answered. “But let us talk of something else now. Esther, do you know when I first fell in love with you?”

Of course, when he asked such a question as that, I could not talk of Treganowen.

“No, I don’t know when it was. If it was at Treval, or at Clifton, it could not have been for my beauty,” said I, laughing; “and it was not for my money, as you knew I had none. How ridiculous my little airs of heiress-ship must have seemed to you!”

“It was the first day I saw you,” said Hubert. “Mr. Winterdale—rough, good, resolute Mr. Winterdale wrote to me in haste to return to England. He would put my greatest enemy in my hands, he said, when I arrived. ‘What have you discovered?’ I cried when I reached Trevalla. ‘Have you found the man who persecuted

my mother to blindness and to death? Are you sure it *was* my mother who in such sorrow and wretchedness left me at your door as the child of Alicia Treganowen? Have you gained some clue to her fate—to my father's? Above all, where is this enemy? Set me face to face with him.'

"‘Softly, softly,’ said Mr. Winterdale. ‘I have discovered none of the things yet that you demand. Your enemy who disputes Treganowen with you has a character and courage that have hitherto baffled me. I will take you to Treval to-night, and show you your foe—a deadly one, the most dangerous you have—a foe whom all your skill will scarcely conquer.’

"There was no time for questions. I went to Treval, and there, upon a little white bed, with face whiter than her pillows, they showed me a tiny child, weird and solemn as a spirit, with eyes that had wandered to and fro through the world, and seen visions

—had they not come to me in Germany with a dream of my mother?—and brow contracted with pain, and terror, and sickly thought. And this was my enemy!—my rival for Treganowen, the usurper and interloper that claimed my inheritance, against whom I was to wage war to the death! My poor little Esther! I stooped over your pillow, and kissed you, and I vowed that you and I would not be enemies. You belonged to me from that hour, and all the plots that scethed around me were not worth the plot that darted into my brain with that kiss.”

I trembled when I heard him tell of his generous scheme to unite our claims. What if it were *all* generosity?

“Do you really love me?” I said timidly and sadly—“I who have been so—so strange. It is only you and Jenifer who are not a little afraid of me even now.”

“That’s a good thing,” he cried, as he

drew me towards him—"I like every one to be afraid of you except myself. As for me, I defy old Thomas Flavel, the ghost-layer, and all ghosts. They will never come to you again, Esther—there is nothing left for them to tell."

"Are you sure of this?" I asked.

"Yes. When I watched your tendency to somnambulism, I divined the cause. The mystery, the gloom, the secrets of your life, had divided your memory, and put a blank between self and self, and this disease was but a dim seeking of your soul for your lost sister—your lost knowledge of my mother—the lost love and confidence of Mildred. I felt sure if I could only elucidate these perplexities, and bring your *whole* life back to you, sound and free, I should chase this strange disease from you for ever. It was for this I went abroad, Esther—it was for this I cared to find Paul."

Always for me, I thought, that he worked and suffered; And it was then I put into his hands my narrative of the blank time, which told him how I loved him, and the portrait I had drawn when in my strange sleep the old affection returned to me, and made my hand skilful.

"You see I loved you always," I said. "But you, have you no shudder for my strange ways? It was not for fear of this you did not write to me so long?"

I clung to him trembling, hiding my face on his shoulder. He lifted it to kiss me, and to smooth my cheek with his hand.

"My dear Esther, if it had not been for these 'strange ways,' should I have watched, have studied, have loved you? Believe me, I can hold you safe from all the demons of your childhood. Why did I not write, birdie? My mother wrote me, you were sad. How could I tell, till Stephen married, whether your heart really knew itself or not?"

"Oh, Hubert! that sounds like a reproach! I was sad for you. This heart that you accuse of not knowing itself, has yearned for you in tenderness and remorse these nineteen lonely months. It has never *really* swerved from you. Shall I tell you when I first loved you? It was when I sat, a tiny child, at Treganowen, with a big watch in my hand, counting the minutes till the doctor came."

"And now he is come, Esther, on what day will you promise to hold him for ever?"

"Let it be soon, in the summer-time," said his mother, who had come upon us unobserved, "lest it should remind me of poor MILDRED'S WEDDING."

EPILOGUE.

Do twenty-two years of happiness give one the right to grieve? I think not, especially if that grief can injure or sadden others. Therefore, neither tears, words, nor monuments mark the years of my widowhood. My love for Hubert lives now as it did in girlhood and wifehood, in kindly charities and tender thoughts for all. If, insignificant as I am, I am permitted to do a good deed, I dedicate it to his memory, and feel I owe it to him, even as I owed all good to him when he lived.

His death was like his life—a self-sacrifice. In the year 1832 the cholera visited Cornwall. Foremost among the succourers of those stricken by the plague was Hubert

Treganowen. He saved many lives, but he lost his own. Two days before his death an eldest daughter—his second Esther, his favourite—was cut down; a few hours afterwards he was himself seized, but there death stopped. I thought to die, too; but I have lived to see my children's children.

In my introduction to this family history, I said I was writing it for these young eyes to read. Let me in a few words tell my reason for this long, painful drawing out of my past life. I write it in the hope, that this faint outline may in some imperfect degree, bring before them the figure of a good man. Above all, I write it for justice' sake, that they may fully comprehend the generosity, which led him all his life long to take the second place, letting the world believe that he held Treganowen only, as the husband of its heiress. This was the sole thing he ever did that grieved me.

Every casual word, every small act that gave honours to me, that should have been his, wounded me to the quick. There were times when I would have thrown off the trammels of silence, if I had not known to disobey would have been to grieve him. I combated his determination by every argument in my power, till he at last appealed to my affection to spare him. He averred it was for his mother's sake he was silent. When she died I entreated him now to proclaim the truth. But he put me off again, saying we both owed it to my father to respect his evident desire for secrecy. Chafing, that he had not yet his rightful place, I obeyed him for my father's sake.

During all this time Hubert and I lived at Treval, and my father and mother inhabited Treganowen. He succeeded where even Miss Mildred had failed; he induced my father to live in the old Towers, though

he knew they were not his. He did it with playful kindness. "Let us make an exchange of residences," he said, "because my mother loves Treval."

Both my father and Mrs. Treganowen—who lived quietly, making no claim to name or estate—desired earnestly to respect Mildred's wishes. Her will, therefore, remained in full force, and when Hubert's mother died, we quitted Treval for Treganowen, and my father begged Alice and Stephen to inhabit it. They did so, and at my father's death it became theirs.

Then, again, I implored Hubert to speak, but he answered me with only kindly words and laughter. "Silly Esther," he said, "are we not very happy as we are? What a coil we should bring around us, what a world of mischief we should do, if we began this hubbub! Firstly, as the son of the last of old Sir Theobald Tremaine's heiresses, I should have Treval thrust upon me, and

that would be a sad thing for Alice and Stephen. They want it. Pencarrow, you know, is mortgaged to its chimneys.

So at last I saw he would not proclaim this family history in the market-place, for the mere sake of gratifying his pride, or rather, let me say, mine, which would fain have made the world aware, that I owed everything to him. But one day, when I told him with tears how it galled and grieved me, that his full worth should be hidden, and wealth and honours given to me which were not mine, he said, with a kiss—

“Esther, birdie, relate the story to your children and grandchildren, if you will, when all those are dead whom the tale could pain.”

Thus, thirty years after his departure into that rest, whither I follow him, I have obeyed his wishes, and penned this history. There are none living now whom my words can fret, or injure. Poor Sir

Stephen—upon whom surely I have been very hard, because my jealous hand could not bear to write a line of praise for any other man, save Hubert—is gathered lately to his fathers.

Let me do him justice: he was a good husband and father, although in the first years of his marriage, he was guilty of some extravagance. But on his taking possession of Treval, I induced Alice to tell him all this story, and when he saw how much he owed to Hubert's generous silence he was touched to the heart. He felt, so noble a gift as Treval, should not be given in vain, and in a few years I had the pleasure of seeing Pencarrow as free and unincumbered, as on the day I signed the deed of gift in the state-room at Treval.

“By George, Esther,” he said to me, “if you had your cousin in your eye, when you threw me over, I don't blame you, for he is worth fifty such men as I.”

"You are worth many men, or you would not say that," I answered.

"If there is any good in me, I owe it to Alice," he responded. "I ought to thank you all my life long for that. You and I should never have pulled together, but Alice, you know, does not think me a bad sort of fellow, Esther."

I held out my hand to him, with a blush for all the hard thoughts I had once nourished, and Hubert coming into the garden at that moment, said, laughing, that we were beginning the old love-making, again, and he would tell Alice, and then let Sir Stephen make peace with her if he could.

Let no one look now on the blue western hills for Treval. It is burnt down, and the Tremaines live at enlarged and embellished Pencarrow. Weddings seemed fatal to the old place, for it was when my niece, Love-day Tremaine, was married to young Lord

Roscorla, that an accident occurred which set the mansion in a blaze. Much of the furniture, and the pictures, were saved, but the house was burned to the ground. So perished the dear old pile, whose roof, whose chambers, whose courts, were so memorably woven with my life.

Let me end here with the wedding. I could speak of many others among my own children and grandchildren, but then I should speak of deaths, too, and friends would say, I ended sorrowfully.

Yet if we live to any length of years, age, and grey hairs, and eternal partings must come to us all. Ah! do not say these things are sorrowful—though wasted with toil and pain, and watered with tears, they are but steps to that rest, which they who live aright shall find in heaven. Farewell!

THE END.

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